

Bill Rea ? Beware of scams

The message was ridiculous. I knew that from the get go.

But I listened to it, and replayed it a couple of times.

?I need you to get back to me on my department division number,? the man, who doesn't identify himself, says, before giving the number to call, twice. ?If I don't get a call from you, we will have to issue an arrest warrant under your name and get you arrested. So get back to me as soon as possible.?

And since politeness always pays, the man ends with a very courteous ?Thank you.?

I received such a call last Thursday afternoon on my cell phone. It took a couple of seconds before the recorded message started. I was on the verge of hanging up when I heard the voice began. As the message was progressing, I mentioned to one of the women in the office what the call was all about. She seemed a little annoyed that I didn't hang up immediately. It's a fact these calls amuse me. But I subsequently learned that about 24 hours later my wife had received the exact same message on her cell. Her phone indicated the call was coming from Belleville, and since she couldn't figure out who would be calling her from there, she let the call go to voice mail. That meant she was able to play it back for me.

It was the same message. Some of the phrasing was wrong in both messages, considering this was supposed to be some professional official who was calling me on a supposedly very serious legal matter. Such an official would not tell me or my wife that they were going to ?get you arrested.? I think the choice of words would have been a little more proper if this situation were legitimate. If I had handed in a composition with that phrase to my Grade 5 teacher, he would have handed it back to me with ?D.O.? scrawled across it, and probably given me a cuffing across the head for good measure (teachers were allowed to do that when I was in Grade 5). ?D.O.? stood for ?Do Over.?

Also the message gave no indication who was calling, which one would supposedly expect from someone with the power to have me arrested. I hadn't noticed that when I first heard it, but realized it when I transcribed the message from Beth's phone.

When I first heard it on my phone, I thought it might purport to be from Canada Revenue Agency (CRA). In fact, that's what I said when I mentioned in the office what message I was listening to. I guess I could call the number I was given twice, but I think it's wise to minimize the contact I have with these people.

And needless to say, I am not in the slightest degree worried about the prospect of being arrested, because I haven't done anything to merit that. The closest I come to committing crimes usually involves speed laws.

And anyone who knows Beth knows she's even less likely to get hauled in by the authorities.

I have received calls like this before. Indeed, I was half expecting to get one on my home phone, which is where I normally get such messages (getting it on my cell was something of a rarity).

I have been told in the past that the police are on their way to arrest me. And since callers in the past have said they were calling from CRA, they would also tell me there's a problem with my taxes. Of course they don't address me by name. And if memory serves, the caller never identifies himself (it's always a man's voice ? I guess that's to make it sound more ominous).

I think the facts are simple. This is a scam, as just about anyone should realize. The problem is there are probably people out there who wouldn't realize that, and possibly act out of fear. These messages are constantly being left on people's phones for some reason, so one can assume there some ill-gotten gain to be realized by the people responsible for them. The calls wouldn't keep coming if there weren't people out there falling for the scam.

I feel sorry for these victims, because it is a fact that successful scam artists are good at what they do.

I think it's ironic that Beth and I got these calls during Fraud Prevention Month. Indeed, it was about a week after Caledon OPP issued a release warning people about such scams, which supposedly come from CRA, or other similar agencies.

I was a little surprised to read there were more than 1,500 victims of such scams in Ontario last year, with losses amounting to about \$3 million.

I was not surprised, however, to read in the release that only about five per cent of these crimes are ever reported. Part of the tragedy in cases like this is the victims are too embarrassed to admit to the authorities that they have been taken in.

But there are ways to avoid being ripped off by the scumbags making these calls. It seems to me some of them are obvious. For one thing, if the call is legit, the caller will know enough to address you by name, and would certainly not have a problem with identifying themselves by name. And actually, just about all the correspondence I've had with CRA has been through the mail. There have been a few communications over the phone, but I've initiated all of them.

Actually, the release from the police was clear that ?CRA will never request by email, text or phone, any personal information such as passport, credit card or bank account information.?

Police also suggest you hang up right away. At the risk of seeming to defy the constabulary, I'll listen to the whole message, if only for the entertainment value.

