

Look out for emergency scam ? Compassionate seniors often vulnerable victims of fraud

OPP remind seniors and vulnerable citizens that they can be primary targets for scammers who prey upon their emotions and rob them of their money.

Members of the OPP Anti-Rackets Branch say the 'Emergency Scam' has been around for many years, but it continues to reach across Ontario. The fact that seniors are hesitant to say 'no' or to hang up on someone on the phone makes them easy targets for criminals to access substantial sums of money.

In 2012, the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre received 2,020 complaints of criminals using the 'Emergency Scam,' sometimes referred to as the 'Grandparent Scam,' in Canada. Of those, 506 people were identified as victims who reported a loss of more than \$1.4 million. Police believe there are many more victims, but they are reluctant to report the crime, either out of embarrassment or not knowing how.

In a typical 'emergency' scam, the victim receives a phone call or e-mail from someone claiming to be a friend or relative, like a grandchild, in distress. The caller or e-mailer goes on to indicate that they are in some kind of trouble, such as being in a car crash, they need money for bail, or they are having trouble returning from a foreign country. The fraudster specifically asks that the victims to not tell other relatives. The victim may get a call from two people, one pretending to be their grandchild and the other pretending to be either a police officer or a lawyer. The 'grandchild' asks questions during the call, getting victims to volunteer personal information. Victims (often seniors) generally don't verify the story until after their money has been sent through a wire transfer service or they have given access to personal banking or credit card information to criminals.

'Fraud in all of its forms costs Canadians extraordinary amounts of money,' commented Deputy OPP Commissioner Scott Tod.

'Increasing awareness is the first step toward reducing its devastating impact. Reporting the scam then allows police an opportunity to warn other people and minimize the chances of the scam spreading further.'

'Scammers are counting on the fact that you will want to act quickly to help your loved ones in an emergency,' Inspector Paul Beesley, of the OPP Anti-Rackets Branch, observed. 'Never send money to anyone you don't know and trust. Verify the person's identity before you take any steps to help.'

To guard against becoming a victim, police advise to first check with another family member or trusted friend to verify the information before sending money or providing credit card information by phone or e-mail. It is vitally important that the incident be reported every time it occurs, to allow police to investigate and find the perpetrators.

Those who suspect they or someone they know have been approached to pay a fee to claim a lottery or other type of prize, contact the local police service or Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-8477 (TIPS).