

Ottawa Journal by David Tilson MP ? Preventing credit and debit card fraud over holidays

During the Christmas season, there is often a great deal of shopping to do.

It's a time when credit and debit cards are frequently used by many to make their purchases, which also means there can be an increased risk of credit and debit card fraud. When this takes place, it can be immensely stressful for victims. However, there are several measures we can take to help guard ourselves against such crimes during the Christmas season and throughout the year. Credit card fraud can take place in several ways. You may lose your card or it may be stolen and a criminal could then fraudulently use the card to make purchases. A criminal could take the lost or stolen card, collect data from the card, and then use the information to produce a counterfeit card. A criminal could also use the data from the card to make purchases over the phone or on the internet. If you've reviewed your credit card statement and you've identified purchases you're certain you didn't make or you believe you may have mistakenly given your credit card information out to someone you shouldn't have, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) suggests that you should immediately contact your credit card company using the phone number which is printed on the backside of the card. Your credit card company will take the necessary course of action to guard against fraud. You should also contact the credit bureau, such as Equifax (1-800-465-7166) or TransUnion Canada (1-800-525-3823) and ask that fraud alerts be added to your credit reports. The next step is to contact the local police to make them aware and lastly, always report any credit card fraud to the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre (www.antifraudcentre-centreantifraude.ca). The Centre may also be contacted toll free at 1-888-495-8501.

RCMP recommends reporting a lost or stolen credit card as soon as you see or know you no longer have it in your possession. The credit card company will cancel the card and will issue a new one to you.

RCMP also has many helpful suggestions on to how prevent credit card fraud, such as:

- ? routinely check your monthly credit card statement or view your statement online to check your transaction history and if you identify purchases you didn't make, contact your credit card company immediately;
- ? never disclose your credit card number over the telephone or internet unless you're certain it's a reputable company;
- ? be aware of scams where the criminals pose as someone else in an effort to have victims disclose their credit card information by phone or by e-mail and remember that your credit card company or bank would never call to ask for your personal information, such as your credit card number, its expiry date, PIN, or the security number on the backside;
- ? take the same steps you use to protect your cash and do the same for your credit card;
- ? always ensure the card that's handed back to you after making a purchase is actually your card;
- ? if you're travelling, keep your cards with you or secure them in a hotel safe;
- ? be sure to sign the back of a new credit card as soon as you receive it;
- ? keep a list of all of your credit cards, their numbers, and put it in a secure spot, which will assist you when reporting lost or stolen credit cards; and
- ? always remember that Canadian financial institutions do not send e-mails to their customers requesting account information.

Debit card fraud can also occur. According to the RCMP's website, this takes place when a criminal ?skims? or swipes the information from the magnetic strip on the backside of the debit card to then manufacture a copy of that card. This also requires the criminal to obtain your Personal Identification Number (PIN) to steal money from your bank account.

If you find yourself a victim of debit card fraud, RCMP recommends that you contact your financial institution immediately and it will take the necessary steps to protect you. Secondly, contact your credit bureau (as listed above) and request fraud alerts to be put on your credit reports. The next step is to contact the local police to make them aware and lastly, always report any credit card fraud to the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre (as listed above).

RCMP also offers helpful tips to help prevent debit card fraud. These include:

- ? ensuring your card is always in a secure location and never allow it to be borrowed;
- ? protect your PIN, as it's your electronic signature (memorize your PIN, don't write down, and change it from time to time);
- ? never share your PIN with anyone;
- ? make it a point to always perform your ABM transactions in places and times where you feel secure (if you're somewhere and you have concerns about the ABM machine, perform the transaction later or go to another ABM and if something seems unusual about the ABM, don't use it and report your concerns to the police, the merchant, or your financial institution);
- ? once you've performed a financial transaction with your debit card, remember to take your card and receipt with you;
- ? if your card is lost or stolen, report it to your financial institution immediately (most institutions provide 1-800 numbers and/or

24-hour service for lost or stolen cards);

? make it a habit to review your debit transaction history online or using your monthly bank statements to identify any unusual activity and contact your financial institution immediately if you do;

? robberies seldom take place at ABMs; however, if this should occur, always put your safety first and comply with the thief's request, and then immediately report the robbery to the police and your financial institution; and

? always be wary of any e-mail messages that appear to be coming from your financial institution. Financial institutions in Canada do not contact their customers by e-mail to ask them for account information.

For more information on credit card and debit card fraud, please visit the RCMP's website at www.rcmp.gc.ca

In taking various steps, we can help guard ourselves against this type of crime and be more secure when making purchases and performing transactions during the Christmas season and throughout the year

