

Police warn people to beware of Canada Revenue Agency scams

Ontario Provincial Police want people to confirm who they're dealing with before sending any money anywhere for any reason. As part of the annual Fraud Prevention Month awareness campaign, Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) and other agency-related extortion threats have continued to inflict significant financial losses on unsuspecting victims. In 2017, the extortion and phishing scam claimed 1,544 victims in Ontario, with losses totalling approximately \$3 million from more than 8,576 complaints. Police admit only five per cent of these crimes are actually reported.

In the typical CRA scam, the criminals extort money from their victims by telephone, mail, text message or email, a fraudulent communication that claims to be from the Canada Revenue Agency requesting personal information such as a social insurance number, credit card number, bank account number or passport number. A new twist is that fraudsters will leave a prerecorded, clear message on a victim's voicemail, impersonating the real CRA. Fraudsters are either phishing for identification or asking that outstanding taxes be paid by a money service business or by pre-paid debit/credit cards. They may insist that this personal information is needed so that the taxpayer can receive a refund or a benefit payment. Cases of fraudulent communication could also involve threatening or coercive language to scare individuals into paying fictitious debt to the CRA. Other communications, such as texting, urge taxpayers to visit a fake CRA website where the taxpayer is then asked to verify their identity by entering personal information. Before responding to any type of communication, think first that this is a scam. Individuals should never respond to these fraudulent communications nor click on any of the links provided.

Here are some warning signs:

? Urgency ? The scammer always makes the request sound very urgent, which may cause the victim to not verify the story. For example, they may say "the police are on their way to arrest you."

? Request for money transfer ? Money is usually requested to be sent by a money transfer company such as Money Gram, Western Union or even through your own bank institution.

CRA will never request by email, text or phone, any personal information such as passport, credit card or bank account information. To avoid becoming a victim, police advise people to hang up, check and verify the information with CRA by calling a trusted phone number, and not the number provided by the caller.

If you or someone you know suspect they've been a victim of the CRA scam, check with a Canada Revenue Agency official, and contact your local police service and the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre, Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-8477 (TIPS), or online at <https://www.tipsubmit.com/start.htm>