

Police warn potential victims to be wary of the romance scam

Romance scams continue to cause victims severe financial hardship and personal embarrassment, which inhibits their decision to report the crime.

Members of the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) Anti-Rackets Branch say criminals use the romance scam to seek potential victims online – generally people who are single or recently unattached. This form of mass marketing fraud often occurs through dating-related “meet” websites, social media platforms, or via e-mail blasts. In some cases, prolonged interaction has cost some victims many thousands of dollars before the “relationship” ends, usually without the individuals ever meeting in person. Among the most vulnerable are seniors.

OPP and their partners at the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre have some tips to help people avoid becoming a victim of the romance scam.

• Don't give out any personal information in an email or when you are chatting online. Educate yourself. Check the person's name, the company name and the addresses used.

• Ask yourself “Would someone I have never met really declare their love for me after only a few letters or emails?” If the answer is no, report it to police.

• Never send money, or give personal credit card or online account details to anyone you do not know and trust. A request to send money to a foreign country to someone you have never personally met should be a red flag.

• Check website addresses carefully. Scammers often set up fake websites with addresses that are very similar to legitimate dating websites.

If you or someone you know suspect they've been a victim of the romance scam, contact police. You can also file a complaint through the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre, Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-8477 (TIPS), or online at <https://www.tipsubmit.com/start.htm>

“Despite the cruelties involved and the emotional trauma sustained, it's still important for victims of romance scams to report the crime,” Deputy OPP Commissioner Rick Barnum said. “All users of computers and the online world should educate themselves and use best practices to ensure their personal and financial security.”