

Orangeville Police warning locals about influx of CRA scams

By Mike Pickford

Orangeville Police are asking local residents to be careful with their personal information as cases of phone and internet scams rise up once again in the community.

The local force is currently investigating a fraud incident after a 33-year-old resident was taken for \$3,400 by an individual he believed represented the Canadian Revenue Agency (CRA).

Called in to investigate last Friday (July 21), police heard how the unfortunate victim made two transactions totaling \$3,400 through the Web-based service Bitcoin. According to Constable Scott Davis, the victim says he was intimidated by the fraudster into thinking he ran the risk of being arrested if he didn't arrange a payment.

“These people typically play on fear whenever they get someone on the phone. The big thing we hear constantly from these victims is that they're told, unless they pay immediately, they will be arrested by police,” Cst. Davis said. “That's something the CRA just doesn't do.”

He said local residents need to be vigilant whenever they're contacted via phone, mail, email or text by anyone seeking an immediate payment on a supposed overdue balance, or requesting personal information such as social insurance, credit card, bank account or passport numbers.

The telltale signs that you've become a target of a fraudulent communication are somewhat obvious, Cst. Davis said.

“It's mostly just common-sense type stuff. The Canadian Revenue Agency obviously has different ways of contacting people should they wish to do so, and they're never going to make threats or demand someone pay an outstanding balance through unconventional methods,” he said. “If approached with the idea of having to pay for a bill through things like gift cards or Bitcoin that should right away tell you it's a scam. The CRA just doesn't operate that way.”

He added, “Basically, just don't take whoever you're speaking to over the phone's word for it. Call up the CRA yourself and they'll let you know whether or not you actually owe anything.”

For the past year the CRA scam has been one of the more prevalent ones reported to police. Other popular scams involve scam artists designing letters or web pages replicating financial institutions. These particular scams may insist that personal information is needed so that you are able to receive a refund, inheritance or benefit payment. Cases of fraudulent communication could also involve threatening or coercive language to scare individuals to submitting information or making payments. Again, Cst. Davis notes as long as you are careful not to disclose sensitive personal information you should be ok.

“Just be confident that anyone from the CRA or banking institutions will not threaten or use nasty language, ask for personal information of any kind by email or text message, request payments by prepaid gift cards or through Bitcoin, leave personal information on an answering machine or give taxpayer information to another person, unless formal authorization is provided by the taxpayer,” Cst. Davis said.

The huge influx in scam-related communication in Orangeville recently followed a somewhat quiet year to date. Cst. Davis noted there seems to be a concerted effort among the fraudster community to target the 519 area code. If you have received a call saying you owe money to the CRA you can call 1-800-959-8381 to check your account. If you believe you may be the target of fraud, or have given personal or financial information by mistake, call the Orangeville Police Service at 519-941-2522.