



AMHERST POLICE DEPARTMENT

21 ACADIA STREET • AMHERST, NOVA SCOTIA • B4H 4W3 • (902) 667-7227 • FAX: (902) 667-0268

Frauds and scams are a significant problem for police agencies. These crimes have increased steadily in the last few years and mass marketing frauds have attributed to over 11 million in losses and ten thousand victims in 2011.

There are countless frauds and scams, but here is information on some of the more common ones we have seen in Amherst.

Prize Pitch Frauds

“Prize Pitch” frauds are scams where consumers are told that **they have won a prize** but that in order to receive the prize, **there is a fee which must be paid in advance**. Once the fee is paid, the fraudster disappears and no prize is awarded. One version of the Prize Pitch is the phone message advising you have won a free trip. Even our police phone lines receive the annoying calls of the “ship horn” or as some say from “The Captain.” The best practice is to hang up. If you press a number to talk to a “representative” you may incur long distance charges. Remember, you can’t win if you don’t enter the contest in the first place.

Another version of the Prize Pitch seen in Amherst is the *“Inheritance Letter”*. The letter purports to be from a government official or lawyer from a country overseas. The letter explains that a person with substantial wealth has died and left no heirs. The writer says if you agree to pose as a distant relative of the deceased person you will receive a share of the huge inheritance. Once the fraudster has you interested, they will ask you to pay some “taxes” owing on the estate. Once the advanced money is forwarded the fraudster will disappear.

Cheque over-payment fraud

Another common fraud is the **“Cheque Over-Payment”**. Fraudsters will typically respond to ads on Kijiji or buy/sell magazines, and offer to pay full price for an item. They provide a cheque which is greater than the agreed price, and state that it was an error on their part. They ask you to send back the overpayment once the cheque is cashed. By the time the cheque comes back as a counterfeit, the money has been forwarded and you are out the full amount on the cheque.

Emergency Frauds

“Emergency Frauds” have been seen in Amherst. Seniors are often the targets of this fraud. A phone call is placed to the victim and the caller pretends to be one of their grandchildren. The fraudster will state that they

have been arrested by police in another province or country and asks the grandparent to wire funds for bail. The fraudster will usually ask you to keep this transaction quiet from other family members so it doesn't cause any embarrassment. I have personally investigated an incident of this fraud where a person was defrauded of \$20,000.

Text Messaging Frauds

Cell phones are being used to facilitate the "***Text Messaging Fraud***". The fraudster sends a text message to generate a response from you. When you send your text message you are charged a fee which can be as high as \$4.00 a text. One technique is to send a text which appears like it is from a friend, i.e. "*Hey. How's it going?*" People are naturally curious and often respond to the message. Another method is sending trivia questions and you are charged for any answers sent.

1-900 Fraud

The "***1-900 Fraud***" is another phone fraud. Victims receive an automated phone call advising they have won a prize. In order to collect the prize you must call a 1-900 number. This number puts you through a voice activated set of prompts that takes several minutes. You will win a prize (usually under \$10) but will have incurred phone charges of \$50.00 or more.

Fraud Safety Tips

Here are some things to watch for that could indicate someone is attempting to defraud you:

- You are asked for the three digit security number on the back of your credit card. Legitimate business may require this number but it should only be provided if you have initiated the transaction and that the business has been investigated to be trustworthy.
- The caller or sales person is overly excited. This is an attempt to cloud your judgement and get you "*swept up*" in the emotion.
- The caller pressures you to make a monetary decision without consulting with friends or family. Legitimate businesses often do the same thing. If you are considering the offer but are not sure, tell the caller to call you back once you have had time to think about it. Don't worry, if it is a legitimate business they will call you back. You won't miss out on "*the deal of the Century*". If you are not interested tell them so and if they won't take no for an answer, hang up. You will find the more you do this the easier it gets!!
- You are asked to pay by cash, money order or money transfer service instead of cheque or credit card. Fraudsters prefer to use these methods of payment as they are more difficult to trace.

Always use common sense whenever you are contacted by unknown persons and remember the old adage, "***If it seems too good to be true, then it probably is.***"

Crime Prevention is the responsibility of all of us. So please take the time to learn what you can do to prevent yourself from becoming a victim of crime. Remember, "*If you are not part of the solution you are part of the problem.*" Until next time, Stay Safe!