

CAUTION USING MONEY TRANSFER SERVICES_

The Commercial Crime and Fraud Sections with the Regina Police Service, Saskatoon Police Service, Saskatchewan Financial Services Commission and RCMP "F" Division have joined forces to promote March as Fraud Awareness Month to Saskatchewan residents and consumers.

During this first week of Fraud Awareness Month, the profile for public education and awareness is caution using money transfer services.

With the incredible advancements in technology, people are using the Internet far more than ever. The Internet allows individuals to purchase or sell items, locate and socialize with people and do their banking all without ever leaving their residence. Unfortunately, criminals are also keeping up with technology and are victimizing people. In most instances, this occurs before the person ever realizes it.

According to the Canadian Anti-Fraud Call Centre (Phonebusters), commercial money transfer services are the main payment method for scams. The reasons money transfers are so popular with criminals is because the transactions occur instantly and are a world-wide service. False identifications are used which allow the criminals to keep their anonymity and transactions can cross international borders making it very difficult for police to investigate.

Here are a few general tips to consider before making any money transfers. These tips should help when deciding whether or not you should proceed using this type of service:

1. Most online auction sites suggest avoiding such wire transfer service payments. A good alternative is using a credit card or a service such as PayPal where, if you are a victim of a fraud, most of these companies will reimburse you for your loss. With a money transfer service once the money has been picked up by the recipient there is no recourse and the money is not recoverable.
2. Never send money to a stranger using a money transfer service. Be very cautious in sending money to someone outside Canada. Even if it is to someone you feel you know, take the time to ask a few key questions to confirm their identity. Be cautious if you are contacted by someone claiming to be a relative in a crisis and who has requested money to assist them. Especially be on guard if they ask you to keep this request a secret to avoid embarrassment. This well known method is used in the "Grandparent Scam". If you have received such a request, ask questions including a call back number. Make contact with the family members of the supposed relative requesting the money transfer. Confirm or deny the claims with them prior to sending any money. Most times you will find the supposed relative is safe and the request is a fraud.
3. Avoid buying items unseen especially when purchasing a big ticketed item online such as a vehicle. At the very least suggest you will send someone to view the item. If it is a scam they will tell you that you will be unable to view the item for a variety of different reasons such as in the case of a vehicle, "because it is in a sealed container at the shipper's location". It is best to try and deal with people in your area. Most times the scammers will only communicate through email. If this is the case, copy and paste their email address and search it online. If they have been previously involved in a fraud, you may be able to learn this by doing this simple search.
4. Avoid using online escrow services. These typically turn out to be false. Fake escrow services are used to gain your confidence in the purchase or sale. They give you an impression they are the most reliable method in safeguarding your deal. One such example of this is the eBay Vehicle Protection Program. Items purchased outside of eBay cannot use the eBay Vehicle Protection Program. The transaction must originate and be completed on eBay. There are many spoofs that appear hyperlinked to legitimate companies. Be very careful in clicking on the hyperlinks especially within emails. Know your legitimate websites and keep them in your favorites bar of your browser.

5. If anyone coaches you in to how you need to respond to a money transfer Agent's questions when you purchase a money transfer or offers "tips to avoid higher fees", do not proceed with the transaction. The criminals engaged in these types of scams know exactly what they need to do to avoid detection. Any transaction involving such coaching should be avoided.

6. If you receive a cheque from any individual with instructions to cash it, then send a portion of the money via money transfer back to them, it's most likely is a fraud. Even though a financial institution may cash a cheque immediately, the verification to determine if the cheque is counterfeit or irregular could take up to 21 days or longer. You are responsible for the amount of money received when you cashed it. This method occurs commonly when person(s) wish to rent properties within Canada. An arrangement is made usually from the person outside of Canada in that they will rent a residence. A cheque is mailed to the landlord and cashed by them. Very shortly thereafter, the prospective renter backs out of the deal usually claiming some type of emergent situation. They then ask for their money to be transferred back to them. After the money is sent back the landlord learns that the cheque was fraudulent.

Through heightened attention of Fraud Awareness Month, the trained staff of Commercial Crime and Fraud Sections in Saskatchewan will be able to share their knowledge and inform the general public. Education on fraudulent activities will help consumers from becoming "victims"

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