

CRA scams on the rise as tax season gets underway

Scammers use threatening phone calls and fraudulent emails to get payments

By Aislinn May, [CBC News](#) Posted: Mar 07, 2018 8:06 AM ET Last Updated: Mar 07, 2018 12:08 PM ET



Canadians are being advised to be vigilant about CRA scams as tax season gets underway.

Tax season has started and as Canadians prepare to fill out their forms, officials are urging people to be cautious of Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) scams that are already on the rise.

According to Ottawa police, these scams happen all year, but there's usually an increase in complaints starting in March until the end of April because scammers target people during tax season.

"We are getting several calls a day about this, so it's happening quite a bit. I know I've gotten [a scam call] at home as well," said Sgt. Stephanie Burns, head of the Ottawa police organized fraud section.

Scammers, who pose as CRA agents, will use emails, phone calls and even text messages to get money and personal information.

Often the phone calls seem urgent and the scammers will use aggressive language or threats to scare people into making payments.

A spokesperson from the government agency said it's important to know that the CRA will never send payment notices or ask for personal information through e-mail, texts or phone calls.

Notices are delivered by mail or through [My Account services on the CRA website](#).

More than \$10M lost since 2014

The RCMP began tracking CRA scams in 2014.

Since then, there have been over 56,000 complaints to the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre and a loss of over \$10 million, said RCMP Sgt. Guy Paul Larocque.

In 2017 alone there were 12,000 complaints and \$3 million lost through CRA scams.



Stephanie Burns, the head of the Ottawa Police organized fraud section, said she is already seeing a rise in calls about CRA scams. (Simon Gardner/CBC)

Burns said the CRA scams work because people are reactive.

"Everyone seems to be scared of the CRA and whenever you get a phone call saying you're

in trouble with them, people want to fix it right away," said Burns.

"But the government is not a thug. They will not come knocking your door down."

Scams hard to shut down

Burns said the CRA scams are difficult to shut down because it's hard for authorities to pinpoint where these operations are occurring.

She said the phoney calls are coming from fake numbers created online through computer technology which is able to change phone numbers, making it hard for police to track down the scammers.

She said police will get complaints about these calls but by the time they investigate further, the number is out of service.

Most of these scams are operating overseas, which adds another layer of complexity.

"This is a mass-marketing, organized fraud scam. This is not just one person," said Burns, adding that investigations into scams are very lengthy, expensive, and take a lot of resources.

She said that if people do make payments to these scammers through gift cards or if the money leaves the country, it's impossible for authorities to track.

Elderly people more vulnerable

Although everyone is at risk of falling victim to these scams, elderly people are among the most vulnerable.

Wanda Morris is the vice president of advocacy for CARP, an association that advocates for older Canadians.

She said as people get older their critical thinking skills diminish and they become more susceptible to things like bad investments or scams.



Wanda Morris, vice president of advocacy for CARP, said elderly people are more vulnerable to scams. (CBC)

Morris said that unlike millennials, who have grown up in the digital world, older people aren't as familiar with technology and it might be harder for them to identify a scam.

She said that these fake CRA websites or emails look identical to the official site which

makes it even trickier for older people.

Morris said it's important for people who are concerned to ask for a second opinion and not to rush into making a payment or accepting a refund.

Burns also echoed this advice and said people should hang up on a calls and not respond to emails or texts that seem fraudulent.

She added that people can call the CRA directly at 1-800-959-8281 if they are concerned.

People who have been scammed should contact the local police and report it to the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre.