

Romance and dating scams

Single or recently unattached people ? often females ? are among the growing number of vulnerable population to be victimized by criminals through fraudulent means. Usually this occurs through contact online via e-mail blasts, social media (Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, etc?) or singles and dating-related 'meet' websites. Among the more prevalent schemes are money transfers via Romance or Dating Scams. In some cases, prolonged interaction with individuals has cost some victims tens/hundreds of thousands of dollars before the relationship ends ? usually after the culprit gets what they want.

According to the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre (CAFC), in 2013 there were 1,728 complaints from Canada of romance fraud ? a year-over-year increase of nearly 300. Of those complaints, 1,149 victims were identified and their combined financial losses exceeded \$15.6 million ? more than any other identified financial loss due to fraud. Almost 60 per cent of all victims were in their 40s and 50s ? often female.

Knowledge is power. All consumers ? regardless of age and gender ? can take basic steps to better protect themselves from becoming victims of fraud, such as never giving out personal information over the phone, the Internet or through social media/dating websites.

Always get independent advice ? from family members, a trusted friend or advisor -- if any offers involve money, personal information, time or commitment.

If you or someone you know suspect they've been a victim of fraud, contact your local police service, the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre, or Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-8477 (TIPS).

Tips to Avoid Being a Victim of a Romance / Dating Scam

? Check website addresses carefully. Scammers often set up fake websites with very similar addresses to legitimate dating websites. Make sure you only use legitimate and reputable dating websites.

? Never send money, or give credit card or online account details to anyone you do not know and trust. A request to send money to a foreign country (using Western Union or MoneyGram) to this person you have never personally met should be a red flag.

? Don't give out any personal information in an email or when you are chatting online. Like any scam, use your computer to your advantage. Educate yourself. Check the person's name, the company name the addresses used, and ask yourself, 'Would this be normal?'

? Ask yourself ? 'Would someone I have never met really declare their love for me after only a few letters or emails?'