

## Beware e-mail 'tax refund' scam

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They are five words everyone wants to read — you've got a tax refund.

But things are not always what they seem, especially when that announcements lands in your e-mail inbox.

In short, if you get an e-mail from the Canada Revenue Agency saying you have hundreds of dollars coming in a refund, don't believe it.

"For one thing, CRA never correspond with a taxpayer by e-mail," CRA spokesman Peter Delis said. "We don't even have their e-mails. We don't ask for it. Why would we have it?"

E-mail scams are nothing new. Every week it seems like another scheme is launched across cyberspace to part unwary users from their money and personal information. It's become so pervasive, Niagara Regional Police has started to compile a list of e-mail scams.

Some are patently absurd and depend on credulity to succeed, such as the old chestnut of a millionaire in a distant, wartorn country needing someone to hold their cash for them with a promise of a piece of the action. But others, like the CRA scam, make a more concerted effort to fool their targets.

"Our concern is that this looked like it was coming from the CRA," said Colleen Lander, senior complaints officer with the Better Business Bureau of South-Central Ontario.

Lander, along with a few of her colleagues, recently received the e-mail that has been making its way around the province.

The same e-mail landed in a Standard inbox last month. It purports to be a CRA "online refund form" and reads: "After the last annual calculation of your fiscal activity, we have determined that you are eligible to receive a tax refund of 386.00 CAD."

The e-mail then instructs the user to click a link that takes them to a website.

Lander said the first obvious problem was the website did not use CRA's URL and an investigation by the Better Business Bureau determined it's from a domain name used in the Netherlands that routes to Russia and Taiwan.

"They do that so it is really hard to track," Lander said.

The site also does not have a link to services in French, a feature on all federal government websites, she said.

The scam site prompts the user to enter personal information, which can then be used for identity fraud, Lander said.

Delis said CRA is seeing a steadily growing number of e-mail frauds purporting to be from the agency.

"We used to only see them at certain times of the year, but now we are seeing them all the time. We've put a warning up on our website to let people know what is going on."

Delis said CRA does not communicate with taxpayers by e-mail and never asks for personal information or discusses refunds by e-mail either.

He said that if someone receives an e-mail from the CRA, the best thing to do is to call the revenue agency to confirm any information the e-mail contains.

On the web:

- Better Business Bureau of South-Central Ontario: [www.hamilton.bbb.org](http://www.hamilton.bbb.org)

- Canada Revenue Agency: [www.cra-arc.gc.ca/ntcs/bwr-eng.html](http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/ntcs/bwr-eng.html)

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