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Online abuse, harassment and bullying complaints reach new record high, rising by 46% in the first half of 2018

Complaints to Netsafe about online abuse, harassment and bullying in the first half of 2018 have risen 46% compared to the same period last year, according to the online safety organisation's latest quarterly report.

The report reveals that online personal harm complaints to Netsafe between January and June this year have increased 46% compared to the same period in 2017, from 927 complaints to 1,358.

Complaints made in the latest quarter of April to June are at a 20-year record high for the online safety organisation, with complaints reaching the highest level since it began operating. Between April and June 2018 Netsafe received 706 personal harm complaints – a 50% increase from the same quarter in 2017.

Despite complaints being at an all-time high, Netsafe CEO Martin Cocker says that he isn't surprised by the figures. "Netsafe's research shows that almost a third of Kiwi adults have experienced unwanted digital communications in the last year, and nearly 1 in 10 have experienced a negative impact on their daily activities. The number of complaints made to Netsafe has been steadily increasing to reflect this," says Cocker.

In 2015 Netsafe was appointed as the approved agency to receive, assess and investigate complaints of harm caused by digital communications under the Harmful Digital Communications Act. The free service opened in November 2016 and is available to all people in New Zealand, offering help and advice to resolve complaints.

Cocker says that although the service has been well utilised since it launched, there are some online challenges that are not currently addressed under the Harmful Digital Communications Act or other existing legislation.

"The Harmful Digital Communications Act was never designed with the intention to solve all of the challenges of online harm, but it was a step in the right direction. In many ways, the Act has achieved what it set out to do, but there is still a myriad of issues that fall outside of its scope.

There are still people who are experiencing harm online, who are having negative experiences online, who feel that they can't participate safely online - people who are in need of help with distressing situations. The complexities of the problem and the intricacies involved with finding practical solutions need careful consideration," Cocker says.

Netsafe is currently working on a variety of projects and recommendations to address online harm in New Zealand, including co-hosting a Trans-Tasman online safety conference in

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Auckland this October. The Crossroads conference will cover key online safety issues such as gendered abuse, image based sexual abuse, balancing free speech and counter speech, and trans-national legal challenges.

Online scam and fraud losses are also at an all-time high for the online safety organisation this year. Reported losses to scams and fraud between January and June 2018 have already surpassed total reported losses in 2017 by \$8.5M. Losses reported to Netsafe in 2017 totalled \$10.1M and currently sit at \$18.6M for the first half of 2018. 11% of scam and fraud reports to Netsafe between April and June 2018 involved financial loss.

People in New Zealand who are experiencing an online issue can contact Netsafe for free information and advice by calling 0508 NETSAFE or visiting www.netsafe.org.nz. Netsafe's helpline is open 8am-8pm Monday to Friday, and 9am-5pm weekends and public holidays.

Netsafe April – June 2018 Quarterly Report Highlights

Reports to Netsafe April – June 2018

- Total reports: 5,007 (+13% from Jan - March 2018)
- Personal harm complaints: 706 (+8.3% from Jan – March 2018)
- Scam & fraud reports: 2,824 (+17.3% from Jan – March 2018)
- Other reports: 1,477 (+7.6% from Jan – March 2018)

Top personal harm categories reported to Netsafe between April - June 2018:

- Repeated unwanted communications
- Harassing/cyberbullying
- False allegations
- Discloses sensitive personal facts
- Threatening, intimidating & menacing

Scam and fraud reports to Netsafe between April – June 2018:

- Reported losses \$6.1M
- Reports with losses: 366
- Average loss \$16,666

Scam and fraud reports to Netsafe between January – June 2018:

- Reported losses \$18.6M
- Reports with losses: 760
- Average loss \$24,473

Top scam categories reported to Netsafe between April – June 2018:

- Fake tech support
- Investment cold calls
- Goods paid for, not received
- Worthless, unnecessary or non-existent services

- Prize promotion/sweepstakes scam

The full quarterly report will be publicly available from 11:30am 23 August at www.netsafe.org.nz/the-kit/april-june-report

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New Zealand statistics around unwanted digital communications quoted by Netsafe CEO Martin Cocker come from Netsafe's Annual Population Survey 2017 available at netsafe.org.nz

About Netsafe

Netsafe is a New Zealand online safety organisation. Netsafe provides online safety education, advice and support for people in New Zealand. Taking a technology-positive approach to the opportunities and challenges digital tech presents, Netsafe works to help people in New Zealand make the most of technology by providing practical tools, support and advice for managing online challenges. Netsafe is an independent, non-profit organisation.

Netsafe's helpline is open 8am-8pm Monday to Friday, and 9am-5pm weekends and public holidays.

Netsafe.org.nz - 0508 NETSAFE (0508 638 723) - help@netsafe.org.nz