



EMBARGOED UNTIL 7AM 14 FEBRUARY 2020

Valentine's Day warning to those 'swiping right'

New figures reveal the number of Kiwis ripped off in romance scams is up, and mostly females are impacted

They say love is blind and, according to Netsafe's latest statistics, the old adage could never be more correct this Valentine's Day.

February 14 provides an opportunity to celebrate love for your significant other, but sadly it's also a time of year where criminals try to exploit singles using online dating apps.

Such introductions can sometimes lead to trust being built that later results in financial loss.

Between 2018 and 2019 there was a remarkable 55 percent increase in the number of reports to online safety organisation Netsafe involving romance scams with a financial loss component.

The average loss reported to Netsafe's helpline during this period was \$31,239.84 per victim and the total was \$4.1 million.

A typical romance scam victim is female, from Auckland, and aged between 41 and 64.

Martin Cocker, Netsafe CEO, says Valentine's Day is a perfect time to not only give roses, but to remember that not everyone we meet online presents as a truthful version of themselves. Their intentions, too, can be equally misleading.

"People meet online every day and sometimes go onto develop meaningful, long-lasting relationships," Cocker says.

"But like everything online, there are risks, and unfortunately Netsafe regularly hears about people falling into a trap and being financially scammed, usually by someone who says they are someone who in fact they are not."

In recent years Netsafe analysts have observed an increased number of people trapped and tricked by scammers using love as a platform and vehicle for menacing endeavours.

"The complexity of such scams, and the audacity of perpetrators behind them, has also – worryingly – meant more people are getting drawn into and exploited through romance scams," Cocker added.

Typically, a potential romance scam victim is contacted online by someone who appears interested in them.

In many cases, the fraudster sets up a fake online profile using a photo found on the internet. Over the course of weeks or months, they develop what the individual believes to be a true romantic relationship.

Eventually, the perpetrator will ask for money for a variety of reasons, which may include wanting

to visit the person but being unable to afford the flight, needing to clear a debt, or wanting to help out a dear relative.

The money is often requested in untraceable ways, like a money order or prepaid card.

Cocker says the best way to avoid being caught up in a romance scam is to be cautious who you communicate with online and never respond to requests or hints for money from someone you haven't met in person.

"If you think you're being scammed you should stop all contact and avoid sending further payments," he says.

Anyone can report a scam to Netsafe or get advice.

-Ends-

Media contact

Angela Boundy – Senior Marketing and Communications Advisor
Mobile: +64 27 228 3930 | Email: angelab@netsafe.org.nz

About Netsafe

Netsafe is an independent non-profit organisation with an unrelenting focus on online safety. We keep people of all ages safe online by providing free support, advice and education. Visit netsafe.org.nz for useful resources or call 0508 638 723 seven days a week for help with an online incident.