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## Four in 10 Canadians report bogus tele-pollsters hitting them up for money

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TORONTO \_ Bogus telemarketers posing as survey researchers hit up almost 40 per cent of Canadians to buy something or donate money over the past year, a new poll suggests.

The Harris-Decima survey to be released on Tuesday finds 38 per cent of respondents complained of such illegal calls.

Under the Competition Act, telemarketers are obliged to identify their company and disclose the real purpose of the call at the beginning.

“Any attempt to sell or raise money following a survey request is a scam,” Brendan Wycks, executive director of the Marketing and Research Intelligence Association, said Monday.

“It really is a serious illegal offence that not very many Canadians are aware is punishable by up to five years in prison.”

The penalty is under review and could be increased to 14 years.

Making sales or donation pitches under the guise of a survey is known as “sugging” for soliciting under the guise of interviewing, or “mugging” for marketing under the guise of interviewing.

The survey indicates that telemarketing survey scams are widespread across Canada.

Provincially, people in Alberta appear to have been hit hardest by the scam, with 44 per cent saying they had received such calls. British Columbians, at 33 per cent, reported the fewest such calls, according to the survey.

A similar study done two years shows the situation has barely improved.

Wycks called the issue important because the scams undermine legitimate polling, which helps inform public policy and corporate decision-making.

“It's a deceptive bait-and-switch scam that violates Canadians' privacy rights by playing on the trust and goodwill that the opinion-research industry has earned with Canadians over many decades,” Wycks said.

“They're like a plague that just make the industry's challenges more difficult.”

Wycks said people receiving survey calls can always verify the legitimacy of the research by asking for the survey's registration code or calling 1-800-554-9996.

Legitimate survey researchers never sell anything or ask for money, said Wycks, who urged anyone receiving bogus survey calls to immediately report the company's name and, if possible, its phone number to PhoneBusters.

The marketing association, which regulates Canada's opinion-research industry, commissioned the telephone survey as part of a series in its VoxPop campaign.

The survey of 2,035 Canadians was done between Jan. 29 and Feb. 15 and is said to be accurate to within 2.2 percentage points 19 times out of 20.

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