



JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

DON'T BE A MULE – SAY NO TO TRANSFERRING MONEY FOR CRIMINALS

Monday, 6 August, 2008: Banks and Australian Federal Police (AFP) are warning the public of job offer scams which trap you into laundering money for criminals by becoming a money mule.

A money mule is someone who allows their bank account to receive stolen funds which are transferred to a designated account (domestic or offshore) using a money-remitting or wire service, minus a certain commission.

The mule is usually approached online via email, instant message or criminals may advertise on legitimate employment websites.

Director of the AFP Australian High Tech Crime Centre (AHTCC) James McCormack, said that although the prospect of making some easy money may appear attractive, any 'commission' payments will be recovered as they are the proceeds of fraud and the person - the money mule - could become part of a police investigation that could lead to a maximum penalty of 20 years imprisonment.

"You would be very suspicious if someone you didn't know asked you to carry a package or money overseas, and similarly, you should be very suspicious about someone asking you to transfer money in and out of your bank account to other accounts," Mr McCormack said.

Chief Executive of the Australian Bankers' Association, David Bell, said "Usually, criminals send out millions of fraudulent job offer emails to random email addresses, in the hope of involving unsuspecting, innocent persons in their criminal activity. You should ignore and immediately delete any such emails."

"Criminals may also use a romance scam where they target singles and ask for money to be transferred and remitted, allegedly for airfares to enable the singles to meet."

"Such transactions are unacceptable to banks and could result in the withdrawal of your banking facilities. The customers who respond to this email also leave themselves at risk of identity theft, as the criminals ask for confidential bank account details," Mr Bell said.

Banks and police advise that if you are offered an opportunity of making easy money and the offer seems too good to be true, then it probably is!

Following some simple advice can prevent involvement in criminal activity:

- Be cautious about unsolicited offers or opportunities offering you the chance of making easy money.
- Be wary of offers from people or companies overseas as it makes it harder to check if they are bona fide.
- Take steps to verify any company which makes you a job offer, for example, address, phone number, email address and website. You could check if it is a registered company.
- Never give your confidential banking details to anyone.
- Always guard your personal information and be suspicious if someone asks for a host of personal details soon after contact.
- Be wary of a person asking for financial assistance – never send money, particularly by wire transfer as these funds cannot be recovered by banks.
- Be cautious of someone asking for detail of your financial status, do not provide the information.

For further information or to arrange an interview:

Heather Wellard, ABA PR

Phone: 02 8298 0411 Mobile: 0409 830 439

AFP Media

Phone: 02 6275 7100

Background notes for editors

A fact sheet with an example of a scam email and a diagram of how the money mule recruitment process works follows and is also available on the following websites: www.bankers.asn.au or www.afp.gov.au.

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