



Media Release

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The Association of Banks in Singapore, the Singapore Police Force and the National Crime Prevention Council caution the public against acting as money mules

The Association of Banks in Singapore (ABS), the Singapore Police Force (SPF) and the National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC) today cautioned members of the public against allowing their personal bank accounts to be used to receive funds that may be acquired illegally. The recipients of such funds are usually asked to transfer the funds to other parties. The agencies warned that by doing so, individuals could be committing an offence under the Corruption, Drug Trafficking and Other Serious Crimes (Confiscation of Benefits) Act and face a fine of up to S\$500,000 and/or a jail-term of up to seven years. Non-individuals could risk a fine of up to S\$1,000,000.

The advisory comes in the wake of a rise in the number of such cases investigated by the Police. In 2012, the Police investigated 93 cases involving up to S\$24.6 million of illegal monies. In the first nine months of this year, 133 cases with transactions amounting to S\$15.5 million were reported to the Police.

In many of these cases, residents in Singapore were actively sought by overseas fraudsters to act as “money mules”. “Money mules” are individuals who receive money that is either stolen or fraudulently transferred, in their bank account. Money mules are typically asked to deliver this money to another person, either in cash or by electronic transfer through money remittance services or e-banking.

Among their many tactics, the crooks would most often befriend unknowing or vulnerable netizens – both old and young – through social networking websites by posing as lonely individuals searching for companionship and love. After establishing a relationship with their target, these fraudsters would insidiously convince their “friends” to use the latter’s bank accounts to receive funds. Another tactic used is to recruit netizens as the “Singapore representative” or “Singapore agent” for a so-called foreign company. The targets are then instructed to open personal bank accounts to receive funds, usually from online scams run in classified advertisement/ auction websites which the locals are not aware of.

Once money is received in the bank account, the targets would be asked to either transfer the money to another bank account (sometimes an overseas one), or withdraw the money and pass it

on to a third party. These money mules were often enticed into such schemes by a “commission” offered for each transaction.

The ABS, SPF and NCPC have been working closely to fight these crimes through consumer education, such as issuing pamphlets to bank customers when they open an account. The public will also learn more about the crime in the upcoming episode of *Crime Watch* scheduled to be televised on Channel 5 on 24 Nov 2013 (Suria on 28 Nov 2013; Channel 8 on 29 Nov 2013; Vasantham on 1 Dec 2013). ABS and SPF have also alerted banks to the crime and advised them to file Suspicious Transaction Reports when there are suspicious transactions in bank accounts. On the individual case level, SPF has provided guidance and worked very closely with the banks to recover proceeds of crime.

More tips on how to identify such scams and avoid falling prey to these fraudsters can be found in the Appendix.

Said Mrs Ong-Ang Ai Boon, Director of ABS: “Banks are cooperating with the authorities in monitoring unusual transactions in bank accounts. We would like to remind customers that their bank accounts are for personal use to deposit money and make payments. Consumers should not agree to use their bank account to make fund transfers for anyone, be it a friend or acquaintance, as it can get them into serious trouble if the funds are from crime-related activities.”

Said Mr Ian Wong, Deputy Director of the Commercial Affairs Department of the SPF: “The police takes a serious view of the activities of money mules. This is because their actions facilitate the commission of an actual offence and also enable the fraudsters to evade detection. The illicit funds that money mules assist to transfer may also be used by fraudsters to finance and perpetuate their criminal activities.”

Said Mr Tan Kian Hoon, Chairman of NCPC: “Fraudsters are manipulative people who prey on basic human emotions like fear, love and greed. When someone asks to use your account to transfer funds, please don’t do so. If you find yourself caught up in your emotions at the time, take a step back from the situation, and ask yourself: do you want to be involved in any illegal transactions that the bank account could be used for? If you suspect that someone is attempting to make use of you as a money mule, please inform the police immediately.”

Contact details:

ABS:

Mr John Lim

Reputation Management
Associates

Tel: (65) 6298 2520

Mobile: (65) 9756 3582

jlim@reputation.com.sg

SPF:

Ms Shamila Baskaran

Public Communications Division
Singapore Police Force

Tel: (65) 9669 3411

Shamila_Baskaran@spf.gov.sg

NCPC:

Mr Tan Pang Yong

NCPC

Tel: 64782088

Mobile: 97288604

tan_pang_yong@spf.gov.sg**Appendix:****How consumers can avoid falling prey to fraudsters**

- Ignore or decline any requests by online acquaintances or persons unfamiliar to you to allow your bank account to be used for incoming fund transfers, especially if a commission is offered. Offers that are too good to be true are suspicious. Do not disclose your personal particulars or bank account details to these people.
- Make a police report if someone, especially one who is unfamiliar to you, offers to transfer huge amounts of cash into your bank account.
- If you suspect that you have been used as a “money mule”, lodge a police report and alert your bank immediately. If the money is still in your bank account, do not deal with it.
- If you are operating a business, be wary of change in payment transactions or payment accounts designated by suppliers or creditors. Always check with the entity to validate the change before you make a payment to the new account.
- Beware of emails or websites which may ask you for your personal information, telephone number and/or email account details. These may be phishing websites to gain unauthorised access into your email account. Install the latest anti-virus software on your computers and update the software regularly to prevent your computer from being compromised.

- Never disclose your User ID, PIN and Internet Banking token codes to anyone. Banks' staff will NEVER ask for such information. If you are approached for this information, please contact your bank.

About:

The Association of Banks in Singapore:

The Association of Banks in Singapore (ABS) plays an active role in promoting and representing the interests of the banking community in Singapore. In doing so, ABS works closely with the relevant government authorities towards the development of a sound financial system in Singapore. Since its establishment in 1973, ABS has promoted common understanding among its members and projected a unifying voice on banking issues. It has brought its members closer together through various guidelines and banking practices as well as the support of projects of mutual benefit to face the challenges of the financial and banking community in Singapore. Today, ABS has a membership of 148 local and foreign banks. Further information on ABS is available on the website: www.abs.org.sg.

Commercial Affairs Department:

The Commercial Affairs Department (CAD) is the principal white-collar crime investigation agency of the Singapore Police Force. It safeguards Singapore's integrity as a world-class financial and commercial centre through vigilant and professional enforcement of the laws. It investigates into a wide spectrum of commercial and financial crimes in Singapore.

National Crime Prevention Council:

Formed in 1981, the National Crime Prevention Council is a non-profit organisation committed to promoting public awareness of and concern about crime and to propagate the concept of self-help in crime prevention. The Council comprises representatives from the commercial and industrial sectors, as well as from the public sector and Singapore Police Force. The NCPC is incorporated as a charity and depends entirely on donations and sponsorships to run its programmes and activities. It is registered as a society with the Registry of Societies.