

RCMP warn of safety scam

Police say suspect inspects extinguishers then flees with cash

Bethany Lindsay

North Shore News

Wednesday, March 03, 2010

North Vancouver RCMP are warning area businesses to beware the return of a serial scam artist posing as a fire extinguisher inspector who asks for cash to bring extinguisher certification up to date.

The fraudster is described as a short, stocky white man in his mid-40s, balding with short, curly, dark brown hair. He usually introduces himself as an employee of Paul's Fire Protection or Metro Fire Service, two businesses that are not registered in British Columbia.

Police spokeswoman Const. Marlene Morton said the suspect's routine is to walk into local businesses offering to inspect fire extinguishers for cash.

"He's always saying cash only, and no businesses work like that anymore," Morton said. Once the so-called inspection is complete, the scammer will place a tag on the extinguishers, saying that they're up to code before leaving.

West Vancouver Police released warnings about the same trick, including an identical description of a suspect, in August and October of 2007. After one reported appearance by the fraudster at a coffee shop on Marine Drive, two employees claimed to have had their wallets stolen.

"We're pretty sure it's the same guy. He's been doing it all over the Lower Mainland," said Morton, adding that the suspect is known to police.

The RCMP are reminding business owners to ask for credentials from anyone claiming to be a safety inspector of any kind. Fire extinguisher inspectors are required by law to be certified by the Applied Science Technologists and Technicians of British Columbia. Additionally, the Better Business Bureau's website, mbc.bbb.org, includes an application that can verify B.C. businesses and charities.

Anyone with information about the suspected fraudster is asked to call the RCMP non-emergency line at 604-985-1311.