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In Canada, complex fraud schemes are targeting homeowners

A Canadian couple recently learned that their home was sold by fraudsters without their consent while they were out of town. Experts say theft of this nature is rare, but there has been a notable rise of similar cases in the country's most populous city.

Early this year, Toronto police said they wanted the public's help in catching two people who were involved in a complex fraud scheme.

The individual, police said, had used fake identities to pose as owners of a home in the city. They then successfully sold the home, handing over the keys to the unsuspecting new owner.

The real owners of the home, meanwhile, had been on the move for work since January 2022.

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The out-of-town couple only learned that their home had been sold without their knowledge months later, after noticing that their mortgage payments had disappeared from their bank accounts.

The incident captured the

fascination of many in Canada, particularly in the Greater Toronto Area and Vancouver, where real estate is categorized as a national obsession because of its high cost - the average home costs over \$1.1m (\$1.74m, \$2.62m, and \$3.1m in the Greater Toronto Area, Vancouver, and Montreal respectively).

Similar stories from other property owners in Toronto have since emerged, and investigators say these one-time cases of property title fraud appear to be on the rise.

For industry veterans, these types of cases are "definitely unique to this point in time," said Trevor Koot, the CEO of the British Columbia Real Estate Association, who has been in the business for nearly 20 years.

"I would say I've never seen anything like it," he said, especially when it comes to the level of sophistication used to carry out these crimes.

What is title fraud? And how much has it risen in Canada?

Schemes related to home or property ownership can typically

occur in two ways: mortgage fraud and title fraud.

Mortgage fraud is typically more common, explained Brian King of King Advisory International Group, a Toronto-based firm that investigates white-collar crimes.

Media caption: Why it takes 30 years to buy a house in Canada

It's carried out when a fraudster uses fake identification documents to place a second mortgage on a house they don't own, usually when the first mortgage has been nearly or fully paid off.

Title fraud, on the other hand, involves tenants of a vacant home posing as the owner and selling that home to unsuspecting buyers. This results in a total title transfer of the property.

In most cases, the real owner and the buyer of the house are able to get most of their money back if there is title insurance on the home. The insurance helps re-establish ownership and covers legal fees incurred during the process.

Mr King said he has observed both mortgage and title fraud increasing in frequency since 2020.

His firm has seen a "rush" of title fraud in the last few years, he said. In almost all cases, the home owners had been living away from fraudsters took over their property, in places like the US and China.

One of his clients, Mr King said, was a couple who moved for work to the UK from Toronto in 2018. Their home in Canada was then sold from underneath them in 2022.

It was sold for \$1.7m and it had been entirely renovated by the time they found out that it had been stolen last June. As of February, the couple is still working through having their title on the home restored.

John Rider, a vice-president at Chicago Title Insurance Company, said the firm's Canada branch had only seen two cases of fraud - mortgage and title - between the 1960s and 2019.

Now they are dealing with dozens, including at least five title fraud cases, all in the Greater Toronto Area, which includes the city and surrounding municipalities.

Similar cases of title fraud have emerged in the province of British Columbia as well - home to the city of Vancouver, where the average home costs \$1.1m - though with less frequency.

Extreme drought makes cattle farmers thin herds, could cause future supply problems

An uptick in drought and other extreme weather events has beef farmers in the U.S. and Canada thinning their herds in near-record numbers, which could lead to supply problems in the beef industry over the longer term, industry experts say.

Farmers will increasingly struggle with profitability amid the climate change impacts, drought, and wildfires more common, they said.

For the past few years, dry conditions and droughts in both countries have prompted farmers to reduce their herd sizes by sending more cattle to slaughter, which has resulted in increased production of beef products, said Desmond Sobol, principal economist with Farm Credit Canada.

He said while this would normally drive cattle prices down, inflation and high demand mean prices are remaining elevated - and if there's less supply in the future, that will drive prices up further, which could affect consumer prices as well.

First there was a drought in Canada in 2021, which meant pastures were reduced and farmers had to buy more expensive feed from the U.S., sending costs higher, said Sobol.

That year, Canadian farmers sold thousands of extra cattle in the fall to make up for a shortage in feed due to the impacts of extreme weather, said Stuart Smyth, associate professor in



The College of Agriculture and Bioresources at the University of Saskatchewan.

"People just had to take a huge hit that year," he said.

The spring of 2022 was dry, in some areas just as bad as 2021, and farmers kept culling, Smyth said.

Now, there's a drought in the U.S., and farmers there are facing the same problems, Sobol said.

More than two-thirds of the U.S. cattle herd is in an area affected by drought, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Farm Credit Canada, leading to the largest contraction of the North American cattle herd in a decade.

In fact, U.S. farmers have contracted their herds three years in a row, for a variety of reasons including the drought, said Sobol. This has resulted in the lowest cow herd on

record, he said.

While this means more beef is being produced in the short term in both Canada and the U.S., it means supply will eventually go down as herds get smaller, and farmers will send fewer cattle to slaughter while they try to rebuild their herds, he explained.

However, while it's normal for production to fluctuate from year to year, this time something is different, said Sobol.

Normally when farmers reduce their herds and beef production goes up, prices for cattle go down, which in turn can soften prices along the supply chain.

But because of inflation and continued high demand for beef, farmers are still seeing elevated prices for their cattle, further incentivizing them to reduce their herds, said

Sobol.

Over the longer term, the increased uncertainty will weigh on the industry, which Sobol and Smyth said could contract as it gets harder for producers to maintain profitability and some may leave the industry.

"The weather has a huge impact on feed and feed availability and water," Sobol said.

"You can't lose money for that many years and still be a viable operation."

rain events are higher in rural areas in Canada compared to urban areas, not all rural residents live in areas where there is a high crime rate. Statistics Canada says nine per cent of residents live in areas where the 2021 crime rate was less than 2,000 incidents per 100,000 population, compared to six per cent of the urban population.

It also found 26 per cent of the rural population lives in an area with a crime rate between 2,000 and 2,999 incidents per 100,000 population, compared to 18 per cent of people in urban environments.

"Nevertheless, it is also observed that a larger share of the rural population lives in a community where the crime rate is very high," the report reads.

"For example, 14 per cent of the rural population lives in a community with a crime rate of 10,000 or more incidents per 100,000 population."

High rural crime rates reported in northern Manitoba: Statistics Canada

A new report from Statistics Canada says northern Manitoba has one of the highest rural crime rates in Canada.

According to the report released Monday, the rural crime rate in northern Manitoba was 36,062 incidents per 100,000 population in 2021, the second highest in Canada. Only northern Saskatchewan was higher, with 67,886 incidents per 100,000 population.

The urban northern crime rate was also the highest among provinces, with 52,386 reported incidents per



100,000 people. British Columbia was a distant second with a reported 14,748 incidents per 100,000 people. The study says that, while crime

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Doctors in Atlantic Canada will soon be able to work in any of the 4 provinces

Doctors living and working within the four Atlantic provinces will soon be able to work within the region without additional licensing - thanks to a new Atlantic Physicians Register.

The registry was announced Monday following a meeting of the four Atlantic premiers. The registry is expected to be in place by May 1.

P.E.I. Premier Dennis King said the registry has been in the works for "the last number of months." He said physicians and surgeons will be able to opt in to the registry. By doing so, they will be able to work in any of the Atlantic provinces without additional licensing requirements.

"Right now, for example, when I fill out my college paperwork, I just get a license for Newfoundland and Labrador, so for me to come and work in P.E.I. or New Brunswick or Nova Scotia is quite onerous," said N.L. Premier Andrew Furey, who is also an orthopaedic surgeon.

"People who would like to move

around in the summertime, for example, P.E.I. is a beautiful place and want to spend a couple of weeks with their family, they can certainly do that."

He said it will also allow the provinces to fill "certain gaps in the system" with a bigger pool of candidates.

"We think that, especially with new physicians, there is a want and desire to have a different style of practice - one that offers opportunity, geographic opportunities, different experiences - that having this

They can also travel as locums, but that requires what Furey referred to as about a month of paperwork.

"I don't see this as a competitive space, I see this as a collaborative space and when one wins, we all win," said Furey.

King, however, did hint at this possibly being a recruitment tool.

"We do know, as Prince Edward Island for example, the 40 doctors that we recruited in 2021... over 50 per cent of them were locums who came here first through one of these agreements, came here, did some work here, found a comfort level here and opted to come back."

Nova Scotia's premier said the registry wouldn't fix the physician shortage currently facing the health-care system.

"It gives us more Band-Aids, if you will, to help plug some immediate issues along the way, while we are developing a moderate and modern system for the future," said Furey.

"Nothing that we do in health is a magic bullet that will just miraculously fix everything, but I think this is one more small little thing that keeps us moving forward and will make a difference, not just today but into the future," said King.

King said he hopes to eventually see a similar system extend to other health-care professions.

remembering her as a "selfless" person who was "very loving" to her parents especially.

He said he feels sad, confused and still in disbelief over her death, adding it isn't easy grieving someone who died so young.

"If you always had a problem, she would always be there to help you out. She never asked for anything in return," Ahmed said.

Shahin Ahmed, 19, grew up with Baroi in Bangladesh. They reconnected in Canada as young adults pursuing higher education in the country.

"It's my regret that I only met her once after I came," said Ahmed.

Ahmed recalls her favourite memory of her in grade school. During a school dance, Baroi dragged her out of her chair and to the dance floor. She was always trying to include everyone, Ahmed said.

"She was just someone that was very vibrant. She was someone you couldn't miss because when she was in the room, she would like to fill the room with her presence."

The victims' families are working to have their bodies repatriated to Bangladesh after the memorial services, Rahman said in an interview.

Tax season 2023: Changes for homeowners, medical expenses and more

The official start to tax season begins on Monday, Feb. 20, this year as the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) opens its portal for Canadians to file.

Before you call up your accountant or wade into the taxation trenches yourself, there are a few changes you should know about for the 2023 tax year.

Bruce Ball, vice-president of tax for CPA Canada, tells Global News that it wasn't a blockbuster year for changes to tax legislation.

"There are some new things to keep in mind, but there weren't maybe large changes like there have been in others," he says.

For Canadians with medical expenses, those who received COVID-19 benefits and some homeowners, there are some expanded benefits and other filing changes this year that might tip you towards a tax return at the end of the process.

Here's what experts like Ball are flagging to their clients about filing taxes in 2023.

When is the tax filing deadline in 2023?

In a normal year, the deadline for most Canadians to file their taxes is April 30 - but this year, that date falls on a Sunday.

As a result, you'll have until May 1, 2023, to file your 2022 tax return.

There's a later deadline of June 15, 2023, for those with self-employment income to report.

But Jamie Golombek, managing director of tax and estate planning at CIBC Private Wealth, notes there's a caveat for anyone in that category: If you owe money on your taxes, the deadline to pay that is still the earlier May 1 date.

One final note on dates: If you're planning to contribute to a Registered Retirement Savings Plan (RRSP) to reduce your taxable income for 2023, your deadline is March 1, 2023.

Changes to COVID-19 benefit repayments

Ball says there's a new form to fill out for anyone who received and had to repay COVID-19 support, such as



the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) or Canada Recovery Benefit (CRB).

If you repaid these benefits in 2022, form T1B would let you amend previous returns to file the repayment in a year that you actually received the initial support, be that for 2020 or 2021.

"Essentially, the CRA will go back and adjust the prior year if you choose to claim it in the year you received that rather than the year you repaid it," Ball explains.

This will apply the associated deduction to a previous year's return automatically, potentially affecting an earlier year's tax return.

Tax changes for homeowners

Two major benefits for homeowners have been doubled for the 2023 tax year.

The first-time homebuyer's tax credit is now worth \$10,000 for those who purchased a home after 2021, up from the previous \$5,000.

The annual expense limit for the home accessibility tax credit, which allows seniors and homeowners with a disability to offset costs put towards making their residences more accessible, is also now doubled to \$30,000.

One major change to the tax code is a new anti-flipping tax targeting homeowners who sell their homes without living in them for more than a year.

Golombek notes that while this new legislation went into effect on Jan. 1, 2023, it will not apply to

now be claimed.

Type-1 diabetics are also now eligible to have their condition recognized for compensation under the disability tax credit. This change applies retroactively to the 2021 tax year and later.

Have an eye on next year's taxes, experts say

Canadians flipping through their expenses for the past year as they prepare their tax returns might feel a second wave of pain from the decades-high levels of inflation hitting their pocketbooks in 2022.

But Golombek says there will be a silver lining to those inflationary woes - eventually. Since tax brackets are indexed to inflation, next year's marginal tax rates will have grown at a much higher rate than in some previous years.

As a result, even if your income is steady from 2022 to 2023, you'll end up paying less tax on your highest earnings amounts next year as the brackets move higher.

"So you won't notice much on the 2022 return. But certainly in 2023, your tax should be less, even if your income is flat," he says.

Golombek and Ball both say that aside from RRSP contributions and some possible income splitting with your spouse, there's little you can do at this point in the year to affect your 2022 tax return.

Rather, both suggest getting an early start on 2023 tax planning.

Ball says it's wise to find a place to store and track deductible expenses like charitable donations and medical costs as they come up so they're not forgotten when it comes time to claim them the following year.

"The big thing is to start early and start accumulating," he says.

Golombek notes that for those who haven't bought a home yet, 2023 will see the introduction of the Tax-Free First Home Savings Account.

This will allow prospective homebuyers to put away \$8,000 annually - tax deducted, like an RRSP or other registered account - and have that money invested and grow tax-free for 15 years to a maximum of \$40,000 per person. At any point, these savings can be withdrawn tax-free for a down payment on a first home.

The forthcoming account is a "wonderful opportunity" for those looking to plan their taxation and savings strategies while looking to break into the housing market in the years to come, Golombek says.

As it relates to fertility, some expenses related to surrogacy or obtaining donor sperm or eggs can

International students from Bangladesh killed in Toronto crash identified

Three international students killed in a highway crash in Toronto last week have been identified by the Consulate General of Bangladesh.

Police have said a car travelling at extremely high speeds on Highway 427 flew over a concrete ramp, landed in a ditch and then hit another concrete wall before it burst into flames late Monday night.

Ontario Provincial Police have said four international students from Bangladesh, who were living in Toronto, were pulled from the car.

A 20-year-old man and 17-year-old boy who were sitting in the back seats were pronounced dead on the highway and a 20-year-old woman sitting in the front passenger seat died after being taken to hospital, police said.

The three students who died were Arian Alam Dipito, Shahriar Mahir Khan and Angela Shreya Baroi, said Consul General Lutfur Rahman.

Rahman said the 21-year-old driver, Nibir Kumar, is the son of popular Bangladeshi singer Kumar Bishwagit and remains in a Toronto hospital in critical condition.

"The Consulate General expressed sincere condolences to the bereaved family members of the deceased and pray for their eternal peace and for quick recovery of the injured one," Rahman wrote in a statement.

Riwan Bin Ahmed, who identified himself as a friend of Dipito, said he loved food, video games and hanging out with his close friends and family.

Dipito had "a very friendly personality, cheerful and joyful," and dreamed of studying outside Bangladesh, he said.

Ayeman Rashid, who identified himself on Facebook as a close friend of Khan, said he was "a very humble guy with manners for everyone."

Khan's family previously told CBC Toronto he moved to Toronto from Bangladesh last month. The 17-year-old was a George Brown College student.

A service for Dipito and Khan is set to be held Monday in the city's east end.

Baroi remembered as a "selfless" and "vibrant" person.

Baroi's family is holding a viewing for her in Toronto Sunday evening. A second-year business student at York University, her aunt Milla Dhaki told CBC Toronto last week that Baroi came to Canada in 2020.

Her goal was to be an accountant to take over her family's garment business back home in Bangladesh.

She was in the front passenger seat and was pulled from the burning wreck alive before she died in hospital.

At her viewing, Nick Sarkar said his dad introduced him to Baroi after she came to Toronto. He recalled showing her around the city,

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