



**EMBARGOED UNTIL 6.30AM**

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## **Netsafe figures reveal continuing upward trend in online harm**

**In the past quarter the community lost more than \$5m and experienced greater harm.**

Online safety organisation Netsafe says the community have reported losing more to online scams and fraud in the past quarter than any other this financial year, and that an uptick in personal harm reports is continuing.

According to Netsafe's Quarterly Report, between January to March 2021, it received 5,295 reports about a variety of online harm incidents including bullying, abuse, objectionable content and scams. And there was a significant 21.9 percent increase in personal harm reports.

Netsafe CEO Martin Cocker says the staggering number of personal harm reports reinforce a trend the organisation began seeing last year during Lockdown – and levels remain consistently higher than any other year in Netsafe's 20-year history.

Personal harm reports related to bullying, image-based sexual abuse, harassment and hate speech. Netsafe provides support for people dealing with these types of incidents under the Harmful Digital Communications Act.

"People are often distressed when they come to Netsafe, and we are here to help minimise that and explain how the law may apply to their situation," says Cocker. "Our team never act on or behalf of anyone involved in a report as work to mediate the incident and try to minimise the harm."

The Harmful Digital Communications Act makes it illegal to send or publish threatening, offensive or sensitive material or spread damaging rumours. Individuals can be punished by up to two years in prison or a maximum fine of \$50,000.

Netsafe's data also shows in the past quarter there has been an almost 25 decrease in overall scam reports, but a 21.3 percent increase in the amount lost to scammers with more than \$5.3 million reported. The average loss was \$6,467.22, resulting in a more than 50 percent increase.

"Nearly \$15million has been reported as lost to scammers this year which is an alarming trend," says Cocker. "To put this into context, approximately \$19 million was reported in FY20."

Netsafe data shows that the most reported category related to relationship and trust fraud followed by consumer investment fraud. The average loss for a romance scam was \$28,752.32.

"We know the number of losses reported to Netsafe represent only a fraction of the money lost. Sometimes people can be embarrassed to seek help, or they simply don't know where to go for support which can add to the harm they experience."

Netsafe remains available a week to help people dealing with online harm. Whether it's bullying, scams, digital parenting or need advice about another issue for yourself or someone else, Netsafe can help.

Make a report and get self-help advice at [netsafe.org.nz](https://netsafe.org.nz).

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**About Netsafe**

Netsafe is an independent non-profit organisation with an unrelenting focus on online safety. We keep people of all ages safe online by providing free support, advice, and education.

**The Harmful Digital Communications Act**

The Harmful Digital Communications Act (HDCA) was passed in 2015 to help people dealing with serious or repeated harmful digital communications. It lays out 10 communication principles that guide how to communicate online.

The Act covers any harmful digital communications (like text, emails, or social media content), including racist, sexist and religiously intolerant comments – plus those about disabilities or sexual orientation.

The 10 Communication Principles mean a digital communication should not:

- disclose sensitive personal facts about an individual
- be threatening, intimidating, or menacing
- be grossly offensive to a reasonable person in the position of the affected individual
- be indecent or obscene
- be used to harass an individual
- make a false allegation
- contain a matter that is published in breach of confidence
- incite or encourage anyone to send a message to an individual to cause harm to the individual
- incite or encourage an individual to commit suicide
- denigrate an individual because of colour, race, ethnic or national origins, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or disability

Schools can report on behalf of their students. For more information about the Act or to access support with an online incident, visit [netsafe.org.nz](https://www.netsafe.org.nz)