

Seminar aimed at identification

Battling bogus bills

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Funny money is no laughing matter to the business community.

Not when the Bank of Canada says \$12.7 million in counterfeit Canadian bills was circulated in the country last year.

That's a direct hit to businesses, which aren't compensated when a bogus bill that's passed through the till is confiscated by police.

Const. Glenn Hodgson, of the St. Thomas
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'Exceptionally good' counterfeits

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police, says the key to avoiding being ripped off is having educated employees who know how to tell a fake bill from the real deal.

At a seminar organized by the police service and the St. Thomas and District Chamber of Commerce on Thursday, more than 70 employees of area businesses got a hands-on lesson in spotting fake money.

The seminar, held at the Hi-Ro Shrine Club on Princess Avenue, included presentations by an official from the Bank of Canada and by Vision Technology Inc., a Woodbridge, Ont.-based manufacturer of the latest in high-tech counterfeit spotting scanners.

"The police, we're always called after the fact," Hodgson told the Times-Journal. "The chances of catching somebody, although we have caught people in the past, it's

slim."

A similar education program was offered two years ago, but noted Hodgson, "I think it's now a bigger problem."

Further, he said crooks have developed techniques allowing them to make incredibly realistic fake bills.

"They're exceptionally good, we've got to look at them twice to make sure they are in fact counterfeit," he said.

What also changed is counterfeiters are churning out \$20, \$10 and even \$5 bills as the Bank of Canada introduces better security features on higher denominations.

Bob Hammersley, Chamber president and CEO, said beyond the dollars and cents loss to business, there's also a convenience factor.

He said customers are frustrated when a business won't accept certain bills for fear of being stuck with

counterfeit bills.

"It's a vicious circle and the customers were getting really upset," he said, noting arming employees with a combination of good technology and education allows a business to accept currency with confidence.

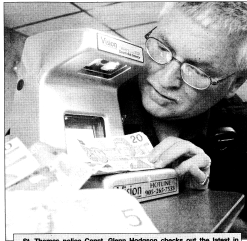
Among those in attendance Thursday was Tina Stevens, who manages the Tim Hortons kiosk across from city hall.

She attended the seminar two years ago and found it helped in detecting the few fake bills that have shown up at her store.

"They're really hard to spot, but because of the course that we had taken before ... we were able to spot them," she said.

Of course, checking money takes time, which can be frustrating for staff.

"It is, but it's saving us money. And this is something that we need to know," she stressed.



St. Thomas police Const. Glenn Hodgson checks out the latest in counterfeit money scanners at a seminar the service ran Thursday with the St. Thomas and District Chamber of Commerce. About 75 businesspeople attended. (T-J photo by Michael Aggins)