

Tax Scams Continue Year-Round

Cross References

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Although the April filing deadline has passed, scam artists remain hard at work, and the IRS is advising taxpayers to be on the lookout for a spring surge of evolving phishing emails and telephone scams.

The IRS is seeing signs of two new variations of tax-related scams. One involves Social Security Numbers related to tax issues and another threatens people with a tax bill from a fictional government agency. Here are some details:

- **The SSN hustle.** The latest twist includes scammers claiming to be able to suspend or cancel the victim's Social Security Number. In this variation, the Social Security cancellation threat scam is similar to and often associated with the IRS impersonation scam. It is yet another attempt by con artists to frighten people into returning 'robocall' voice-mails. Scammers may mention overdue taxes in addition to threatening to cancel the person's SSN.
- **Fake tax agency.** This scheme involves the mailing of a letter threatening an IRS lien or levy. The lien or levy is based on bogus delinquent taxes owed to a non-existent agency, "Bureau of Tax Enforcement." There is no such agency. The lien notification scam also likely references the IRS to confuse potential victims into thinking the letter is from a legitimate organization.

Both display classic signs of being scams. The IRS and its Security Summit partners (the state tax agencies and the tax industry) remind everyone to stay alert to scams that use the IRS or reference taxes, especially in late spring and early summer as tax bills and refunds arrive.

Phone scams. The IRS does not leave pre-recorded, urgent or threatening messages. In many variations of the phone scam, victims are told if they do not call back, a warrant will be issued for their arrest. Other verbal threats include law-enforcement agency intervention, deportation or revocation of licenses.

Criminals can fake or "spoof" caller ID numbers to appear to be anywhere in the country, including from an IRS office. This prevents taxpayers from being able to verify the true call number. Fraudsters also have spoofed local sheriff's offices, state departments of motor vehicles, federal agencies and others to convince taxpayers the call is legitimate.

Email phishing scams. The IRS does not initiate contact with taxpayers by email to request personal or financial information. The IRS initiates most contacts through regular mail delivered by the United States Postal Service. However, there are special circumstances when the IRS will call or come to a home or business. These visits include times when a taxpayer has an overdue tax bill, a delinquent tax return, a delinquent employment tax payment, or the IRS needs to tour a business as part of a civil investigation (such as an audit or collection case) or during criminal investigation.

If a taxpayer receives an unsolicited email that appears to be from either the IRS or a program closely linked to the IRS that is fraudulent, report it by sending it to phishing@irs.gov. The Report Phishing and Online Scams page provides complete details.

Telltale signs of a scam. The IRS (and its authorized private collection agencies) will never:

- Call to demand immediate payment using a specific payment method such as a pre-paid debit card, gift card or wire transfer. The IRS does not use these methods for tax payments. Generally, the IRS will first mail a bill to any taxpayer who owes taxes. All tax payments should only be made payable to the U.S. Treasury and checks should never be made payable to third parties.
- Threaten to immediately bring in local police or other law-enforcement groups to have the taxpayer arrested for not paying.
- Demand that taxes be paid without giving the taxpayer the opportunity to question or appeal the amount owed.
- Ask for credit or debit card numbers over the phone.

For anyone who doesn't owe taxes and has no reason to think they do:

- Hang up immediately. Do not give out any information.
- Contact the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration to report the call. Use their IRS Impersonation Scam Reporting web page.
- Report the caller ID and/or callback number to the IRS by sending it to phishing@irs.gov (Subject: IRS Phone Scam).
- Report it to the Federal Trade Commission. Use the FTC Complaint Assistant on ftc.gov. Add "IRS Telephone Scam" in the notes.

Author's Comment

Do not play along with the person on the phone or attempt to keep that person on the line to waste their time. The IRS says to hang up immediately. Scammers call numerous numbers to find that one person out of many they can scam. Keeping them on the phone simply draws attention to yourself and has no effect on their ability to call others. If you try to stir up the hornets' nest, they are more likely to retaliate in some other way.

For anyone who owes tax or thinks they do:

- View tax account information online at www.irs.gov to see the actual amount owed. Taxpayers can also review their payment options,
- Call the number on the billing notice, or
- Call the IRS at 800-829-1040. IRS workers can help.

The IRS does not use text messages or social media to discuss personal tax issues, such as those involving bills or refunds. For more information, visit the Tax Scams and Consumer Alerts page on www.irs.gov. Additional information about tax scams is also available on IRS social media sites, including YouTube videos.