



Protect Yourself from eMail Tax Scams

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Spring into Tax Scams

As we get ready to pay our taxes, be on the lookout for seemingly legitimate “tax services” that actually steal your identity and your tax refund. The bad guy promises a bigger refund when he prepares and files your taxes for you (for a fee, of course). But then he steals your identity and never files your taxes. You're left paying a fee for the fraudulent service, not getting your refund, and you may face charges for not filing your tax return or for filing a false return.

How to Recognize an Email Tax Scam

According to the IRS, here are the key ways to recognize an email tax scam. The email

- Requests personal and/or financial information, such as name, SSN, bank or credit card account numbers or security-related information, such as mother's maiden name, either in the email itself or on another site to which a link in the email directs you
- Includes exciting offers to get you to respond, such as mentioning a tax refund or offering to pay you to participate in an IRS survey
- Threatens a consequence for not responding to the email, such as additional taxes or blocking access to your funds
- Contains incorrect spelling for the Internal Revenue Service or other federal agencies
- Uses incorrect grammar or odd phrasing, or
- Discusses “changes to tax laws” that include a downloadable document (usually in PDF format) that purports to explain the new tax laws (these downloads are populated with malware that, once downloaded, may infect your computer).

Protect Yourself

Here are five ways to stay safer this tax season:

- **Secure your computer.** If your computer does not have proper security controls, it is vulnerable to access by criminals who may be able to steal information stored on it. Make sure your computer has the latest security updates installed. Check that your anti-virus and anti-spyware



software are running properly and are receiving automatic updates from the vendor. If you haven't already done so, install and enable a firewall.

- **Carefully select the sites you visit.** Safely searching for tax forms, advice on deductibles, tax preparers, and other similar topics requires caution. Know the site. Know the company. Do not visit a site by clicking on a link sent in an email, found on someone's blog, or on an advertisement. The website you land on may look just like the real site, but it may be a well-crafted fake.
- **Don't fall prey to email, web, or social networking scams.** Common scams tout tax rebates, offer great deals on tax preparation, or offer a free tax calculator tool. If you did not solicit the information, it's likely a scam. ***If the email claims to be from the IRS, it's a scam – the IRS will not contact you via email, text messaging, or your social network, nor does it advertise on websites.*** If the email appears to be from your employer, bank, broker, etc. claiming there is an issue with what they reported for you and you need to verify some information, it might be a scam. Do not respond to the email. Contact the entity directly (using a phone number from a known-good source, like the telephone book).
- **Never send sensitive information in an email.** It may be intercepted and read by criminals.
- **Use strong passwords.** Cyber criminals have developed programs that automate the ability to guess passwords. To protect yourself, passwords must be difficult for others to guess, and easy for you to remember. Passwords should have a minimum of nine characters and include a mix of uppercase letters, lowercase letters, numbers, and symbols. Make sure your work passwords are different from your personal passwords.

For More Information

For additional information about tax-related scams and identity theft, please visit:

- **Taxpayer Guide to Identity Theft:** www.irs.gov/uac/Taxpayer-Guide-to-Identity-Theft
- **Tax Scams/Consumer Alerts:** www.irs.gov/uac/Tax-Scams-Consumer-Alerts
- **IRS Releases the Dirty Dozen Tax Scams for 2012:** www.irs.gov/uac/IRS-Releases-the-Dirty-Dozen-Tax-Scams-for-2012
- **What's Hot – IRS:** www.irs.gov/uac/What's-Hot
- **Report Phishing:** www.irs.gov/uac/Report-Phishing



My Favorite Spring Poem

Spring isn't all IRS and scams, though. To help you enjoy the season, here's my favorite spring poem.

Spring is sprung,

the grass is riz,

I wonder where the boidies is.

They say the boid is on the wing.

But that's absoid.

The wing is on the boid.

— Anonymous author (not the hacker collective!)