

Phone Scams a Serious Threat: IRS Phone Scams

Aggressive and threatening phone calls by criminals impersonating IRS agents remain a major threat to taxpayers, headlining the annual "Dirty Dozen" list of tax scams for the 2017 filing season, the Internal Revenue Service announced today.

During filing season, the IRS generally sees a surge in scam phone calls that threaten police arrest, deportation, license revocation and other things. The IRS reminds taxpayers to guard against all sorts of con games that arise at any time and pick up during tax season.

"Don't be fooled by surprise phone calls by criminals impersonating IRS agents with threats or promises of a big refund if you provide them with your private information," said IRS Commissioner John Koskinen. "If you're surprised to get a call from the IRS, it almost certainly isn't the real IRS. We generally initially contact taxpayers by mail."

The Dirty Dozen is compiled annually by the IRS and lists a variety of common scams taxpayers may encounter any time during the year. Many of these con games peak during filing season as people prepare their tax returns or hire someone to do so.

The Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA) reports they have become aware of over 10,000 victims who have collectively paid over \$54 million as a result of phone scams since October 2013.

"Everyone can share the word about scam phone calls-- just hang up and don't engage these people," Koskinen said. "Despite recent successes against phone scam artists, these scams constantly evolve and people need to remain vigilant. We'd like to thank law-enforcement, tax professionals, consumer advocates, the states, other government agencies, the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration and many others for helping us continue this fight and protect taxpayers."

How do the scams work?

Scammers make unsolicited calls claiming to be IRS officials. They demand that the victim pay a bogus tax bill. They con the victim into sending cash, usually through a wire transfer or a prepaid debit card or gift card, like an iTunes card. They may also leave "urgent" callback requests through phone "robo-calls," or via a phishing email.

Many phone scams use threats to intimidate and bully a victim into paying. They may even threaten to arrest, deport or revoke the driver's license of their victim if they don't get the money.

Scammers often alter caller ID numbers to make it look like the IRS or another agency is calling. The callers use IRS employee titles and fake badge numbers to appear legitimate. They may use the victim's name, address and other personal information to make the call sound official.

The IRS also reminded taxpayers today that scammers change tactics. Aggressive and threatening phone calls by criminals impersonating IRS agents remain a major threat to taxpayers, but variations of the IRS impersonation scam continue year-round and they tend to peak when scammers find prime opportunities to strike.

Here are some things the scammers often do but the IRS will not do. Any one of these five things is a tell-tale sign of a scam.

The IRS will never:

Call to demand immediate payment using a specific payment method such as a prepaid debit card, gift card or wire transfer. Generally, the IRS will first mail a bill to any taxpayer who owes taxes.

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 taxpayers who don't owe taxes or don't think they do:

Do not give out any information. Hang up immediately.

Contact TIGTA to report the call. Use their "IRS Impersonation Scam Reporting" web page. Alternatively, call 800-366-4484.

Report it to the Federal Trade Commission. Use the "FTC Complaint Assistant" on FTC.gov. Please add "IRS Telephone Scam" in the notes.

For those who owe taxes or think they do:

Call the IRS at 800-829-1040. IRS workers can help.