Identity Theft Information for Taxpayers

Identity theft places a burden on its victims and presents a challenge to many businesses, organizations and governments, including the IRS. The IRS combats this crime with an aggressive strategy of prevention, detection and victim assistance.

What is tax-related identity theft?

Tax-related identity theft occurs when someone uses your stolen Social Security number (SSN) to file a tax return claiming a fraudulent refund. If you become a victim, we are committed to resolving your case as quickly as possible.

You may be unaware that this has happened until you e-file your return and discover that a return already has been filed using your SSN. Or, the IRS may send you a letter saying it has identified a suspicious return using your SSN.

Know the warning signs

Be alert to possible tax-related identity theft if you are contacted by the IRS about:

- More than one tax return was filed for you,
- You owe additional tax, have a refund offset or have had collection actions taken against you for a year you did not file a tax return, or
- IRS records indicate you received wages or other income from an employer for whom you did not work.

Steps for victims of identity theft

If you are a victim of identity theft, the Federal Trade Commission recommends these steps:

- File a complaint with the FTC at identitytheft.gov.
- Contact one of the three major credit bureaus to place a 'fraud alert' on your credit records:
  - www.Equifax.com 1-800-525-6285
  - www.Experian.com 1-888-397-3742
  - www.TransUnion.com 1-800-680-7289
- Close any financial or credit accounts opened by identity thieves

If your SSN is compromised and you know or suspect you are a victim of tax-related identity theft, the IRS recommends these additional steps:

- Respond immediately to any IRS notice; call the number provided.
- Complete IRS Form 14039, *Identity Theft Affidavit*, if your e-file return rejects because of a duplicate filing under your SSN or you are instructed to do so. Use a fillable form at IRS.gov, print, then attach form to your paper return and mail according to instructions.
- Continue to pay your taxes and file your tax return, even if you must do so by paper.
- If you previously contacted the IRS and did not have a resolution, contact us for specialized assistance at 1-800-908-4490. We have teams available to assist.

More information is available at: IRS.gov/identitytheft or FTC's identitytheft.gov.

About data breaches and your taxes

Not all data breaches or computer hacks result in tax-related identity theft. It's important to know what type of personal information was stolen.

If you've been a victim of a data breach, keep in touch with the company to learn what it is doing to protect you and follow the "Steps for victims of identity theft." Data breach victims should submit a Form 14039, *Identity Theft Affidavit,* only if your Social Security number has been compromised and IRS has informed you that you may be a victim of tax-related identity theft or your e-file return was rejected as a duplicate.

How you can reduce your risk

Join efforts by the IRS, states and tax industry to protect your data. Taxes. Security. Together. We all have a role to play. Here's how you can help:

- Always use security software with firewall and anti-virus protections. Use strong passwords.
- Learn to recognize and avoid phishing emails, threatening calls and texts from thieves posing as legitimate organizations such as your bank, credit card companies and even the IRS.
- Do not click on links or download attachments from unknown or suspicious emails.
- Protect your personal information and that of any dependents. Don't routinely carry Social Security cards, and make sure your tax records are secure.

See Publication 4524, *Security Awareness for Taxpayers* to learn more.

NOTE: The IRS does not initiate contact with taxpayers by email to request personal or financial information. This includes any type of electronic communication, such as text messages and social media channels.

IRS

TAXES. SECURITY. TOGETHER.

The IRS, the states and the tax industry are committed to protecting you from identity theft. We've strengthened our partnership to fight a common enemy – the criminals – and to devote ourselves to a common goal – serving you. Working together, we've made many changes to combat identity theft, and we are making progress. However, cybercriminals are constantly evolving, and so must we. The IRS is working hand-in-hand with your state revenue officials, your tax software provider and your tax preparer. But, we need your help. We need you to join with us. By taking a few simple steps, you can better protect your personal and financial data online and at home.

Please consider these steps to protect yourselves from identity thieves:

Keep Your Computer Secure

- Use security software and make sure it updates automatically; essential tools include:
  - Firewall
  - Virus/malware protection
  - File encryption for sensitive data
- Treat your personal information like cash, don't leave it lying around
- Check out companies to find out who you're really dealing with
- Give personal information only over encrypted websites – look for "https" addresses.
- Use strong passwords and protect them
- Back up your files

Avoid Phishing and Malware

- Avoid phishing emails, texts or calls that appear to be from the IRS and companies you know and trust, go directly to their websites instead
- Don't open attachments in emails unless you know who sent it and what it is
- Download and install software only from websites you know and trust
- Use a pop-up blocker
- Talk to your family about safe computing

Protect Personal Information

Don't routinely carry your or any dependents' Social Security card or documents with SSN. Do not overshare personal information on social media. Information about past addresses, a new car, a new home and your children help identity thieves pose as you. Keep old tax returns and tax records under lock and key or encrypted if electronic. Shred tax documents before trashing.

Avoid IRS Impersonators. The IRS will not call you with threats of jail or lawsuits. The IRS will not send you an unsolicited email suggesting you have a refund or that you need to update your account. The IRS will not request any sensitive information online. These are all scams, and they are persistent. Don't fall for them. Forward IRS-related scam emails to phishing@irs.gov. Report IRS-impersonation telephone calls at www.tigta.gov.

Additional steps:

- Check your credit report annually; check your bank and credit card statements often;
- Review your Social Security Administration records annually: Sign up for My Social Security at www.ssa.gov.
- If you are an identity theft victim whose tax account is affected, review www.irs.gov/identitytheft for details.