



PENNSYLVANIA STATE POLICE

COMMUNITY AWARENESS BULLETIN

CAB 006-15

August 31, 2015

INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE PHONE SCAM

Scam artists are working multiple angles to get your hard earned money. One of the most common tactics is the use of an aggressive phone scam, which has been described by members of Congress as "the largest and most pervasive" impersonation scam in the history of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS).¹

This particular phone scam has been reported across the United States. Victims of this scam typically receive a phone call wherein callers (usually with foreign accents) claim to be IRS employees, using false names and IRS identification badge numbers.² The scammers are quite convincing and often know a lot about their targets. They also alter the telephone caller ID to make it appear as though the IRS is calling.³ Victims are informed that they owe money to the IRS, and, if they protest, they are threatened with arrest, deportation, or suspension of a business or driver's license.⁴ Many people are justifiably fearful of such consequences, and hastily provide the requested personal and financial information to satisfy their "back taxes."

Some victims were reportedly told they were owed a refund, as an attempt to trick them into providing personal information.⁵ According to the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration, more than 10,000 calls per week have been made to households across the country.⁶

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) received nearly 55,000 complaints regarding IRS imposter scams last year; a 25-percent increase from 2013. In the last two years, more than 400,000 people have filed complaints with the U.S. Treasury Department in reference to IRS imposters. Over 3,000 people have been defrauded out of more than 15 million dollars.⁷

Because many of these scams originate from outside the country, they are difficult for law enforcement to investigate. For that reason, consumer education is the best way to safeguard your money. The IRS reminds people that it is fairly simple to spot an IRS imposter. Listed below are five things the scammers often do, but the IRS will not. Any one of these five things is a tell-tale sign of a scam. The IRS will never:

1. Call to demand immediate payment, nor will they call regarding taxes owed without first having mailed you a notice.
2. Demand that you pay taxes without giving you the opportunity to question or appeal the amount they say you owe.
3. Threaten to contact local police or other law-enforcement agencies to have you arrested for not paying.
4. Require you use a specific payment method for your taxes, such as a prepaid debit card.
5. Ask for credit or debit card numbers over the phone.

If you receive a phone call from someone claiming to be from the IRS requesting money or bank account information for a refund, here is what you should do:

- If you know you owe taxes or think you might, call the IRS at 1.800.829.1040. The IRS employees can assist you with a payment issue.



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- If you know you do not owe taxes or have no reason to believe that you do, report the incident to the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA) at 1.800.366.4484 or at www.tigta.gov.
- You can file a complaint using the [FTC Complaint Assistant](#); choose "Other" and then "Imposter Scams." If the complaint involves someone impersonating the IRS, include the words "IRS Telephone Scam" in the notes.

Remember, the IRS does not use unsolicited email, text messages or any social media to discuss your personal taxes. For more information on reporting tax scams, go to www.irs.gov and type "scam" in the search box.⁸

¹ Weisbaum, H. (2015, April 15). 'Imposter' Tax scam worse than ever, Congress holds hearing. *Ncbnews.com*. Retrieved 07/31/2015 from <http://www.nbcnews.com/business/taxes/tax-impostor-scam-worse-ever-congress-holds-hearing-n341906>.

² Tax Scams/Consumer Alerts. *Irs.gov*. Retrieved on 07/31/2015 from <http://www.irs.gov/uac/Tax-Scams-Consumer-Alerts>.

³ Tax Scams/Consumer Alerts. *Irs.gov*. Retrieved on 07/31/2015 from <http://www.irs.gov/uac/Tax-Scams-Consumer-Alerts>.

⁴ Tax Scams/Consumer Alerts. *Irs.gov*. Retrieved on 07/31/2015 from <http://www.irs.gov/uac/Tax-Scams-Consumer-Alerts>.

⁵ Tax Scams/Consumer Alerts. *Irs.gov*. Retrieved on 07/31/2015 from <http://www.irs.gov/uac/Tax-Scams-Consumer-Alerts>.

⁶ Weisbaum, H. (2015, April 15). 'Imposter' Tax scam worse than ever, Congress holds hearing. *Ncbnews.com*. Retrieved 07/31/2015 from <http://www.nbcnews.com/business/taxes/tax-impostor-scam-worse-ever-congress-holds-hearing-n341906>.

⁷ Weisbaum, H. (2015, April 15) 'Imposter' Tax scam worse than ever, Congress holds hearing. *Ncbnews.com*. Retrieved 07/31/2015 from <http://www.nbcnews.com/business/taxes/tax-impostor-scam-worse-ever-congress-holds-hearing-n341906>

⁸ IRS (2014, August 28). Scam phone calls continue; IRS identifies five easy ways to spot suspicious calls. *Irs.gov*. Retrieved on 07/31/2015 from <http://www.irs.gov/uac/Newsroom/Scam-Phone-Calls-Continue;-IRS-Identifies-Five-Easy-Ways-to-Spot-Suspicious-Calls>.