

The News You Need to Know



Left to right: Steven Bell, Thomas Page, Christopher Miller, Alan Loss and Andrew Barninger.

Con artists are always thinking of ways to steal personal information. Here is just one example. If you are ever suspicious about an offer or claim, please do not hesitate to contact us.



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Tax Season Phone Scams

Beware of crooks calling you up & claiming to be the IRS.

Every year, con artists posing as the Internal Revenue Service perpetrate scams on taxpayers. Their weapon is a telephone, and they use it to leave thousands of households poorer. These gambits can seem very convincing, but you need not fall prey to them if you are informed.

The IRS will never call you up & demand money. Nor will the IRS contact you by phone to discuss your refund. In addition, it will not use social media, text messages or emails out of the blue to talk about tax matters with you.¹

Not everyone knows this, and these criminals exploit that fact. In particular, these crooks target immigrants and elders. They presume that these demographic groups do not understand tax law and tax collection proceedings as well as others. Sometimes the caller ID will even suggest the “IRS” to further the scam.¹

Since December 2013, federal investigators have detected about 290,000 fraudulent IRS calls made to homes and businesses. About 3,000 people succumbed to these scams during that period, forking over a total of \$14 million in “back taxes” – roughly \$5,000 per taxpayer.²

What are the telltale signs of a bogus IRS call? The classic sign is the demand for an immediate payment of “taxes” when no bill for delinquent taxes has been sent to you by the IRS to begin with. The IRS nearly always makes initial contact with taxpayers by mail.²

Another common move is asking for a credit or debit card number. In one common scam, the caller alleges that you have unpaid back taxes that can only be settled by buying a prepaid debit card (and by supplying the card number to the caller).¹

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Bullying is another red flag. In another prevalent scam, a message may be left saying that this is a “final notice from the Internal Revenue Service” and tell you that the IRS is filing a lawsuit against you on a business or personal tax issue. Threats of arrest, deportation or losing your driver’s license may be made. The caller may also tell you that you have no way to appeal, no chance to plead innocence – you are guilty and must pay taxes owed now.^{1,2}

How can you report frauds like this? If you know for a fact that you do not owe any back taxes, call up the office of the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA) at 1-800-366-4484 and report what happened to you. (TIGTA is on the Web at tigta.gov.) Alternately, go to FTC Complaint Assistant website maintained by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and file a complaint there (click on “Other” in the right-side menu, and then click on “Imposter Scams”). Start your notes with the phrase “IRS Telephone Scam.”¹

If you think you actually might owe some back taxes, call the IRS instead at IRS at 1-800-829-1040 as that really should be resolved; IRS staffers can assist you with such a matter.¹

Watch out for these crooks, and let others know about their tactics so that they may avoid becoming victims.

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Citations.

- 1 - irs.gov/uac/Newsroom/Scam-Phone-Calls-Continue;-IRS-Identifies-Five-Easy-Ways-to-Spot-Suspicious-Calls [10/29/14]
- 2 - cleveland.com/business/index.ssf/2015/01/nearly_3000_people_in_us_have.html [1/23/15]