

Daily Money Tip: IRS urges extra vigilance on ID theft

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We're harping on identity theft because it's tax season and the Internal Revenue Service has identified this crime as its top scam for 2014.

The IRS is so worried about ID theft that it has issued special instructions on how to prevent your identity - and your tax refund - from being stolen.

Targets are often elderly, infirm, poor, or immigrants, but anyone with a valid Social Security number and birth date could be, too. What can you do to stop it?

Ed Jenkins, a tax director with CBIZ MHM's offices in Plymouth Meeting, says: "First off, the IRS will never e-mail you or call you. They generally only contact taxpayers by mail."

Bogus phone calls

The IRS and Jenkins warn that callers claiming to be from the agency may allege that you owe taxes, and that you must pay by prepaid debit card or wire transfer. They are scammers.

If you refuse, they may threaten arrest, deportation, or loss of a business or driver's license. They often use common names and fake IRS badge numbers, may know the last four digits of your Social Security number, may make your caller ID appear as if the IRS is really calling, or send bogus IRS e-mails to support their scams. Some even call a second time claiming to be police or from the Department of Motor Vehicles.

Don't give them any information. Hang up. The IRS does not ask for payment using prepaid debit card or wire transfer. And it won't ask for a credit-card number over the phone.

Once an ID is stolen . . .

If a tax thief has already filed a return under your name, contact the IRS Identity Theft Specialized Unit toll-free at 1-800-908-4490. This unit is specially trained in identity-theft

issues. Then call and report the incident to the U.S. Treasury's inspector general for tax administration at 1-800-366-4484.

The IRS has an identity-theft Web page worth visiting ([http:// www.irs.gov/uac/Identity-Protection](http://www.irs.gov/uac/Identity-Protection)). Also, Jenkins advises, you should:

File a report with your local police department.

Place a fraud alert on your credit reports by contacting the national credit bureaus.

File a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission.

Contact your banks or other financial institutions to close any accounts that may have been tampered with or opened without your permission.