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IRS Reiterates Warning of Pervasive Telephone Scam

IR-2014-53, April 14, 2014

WASHINGTON — As the 2014 filing season nears an end, the Internal Revenue Service today issued another strong warning for consumers to guard against sophisticated and aggressive phone scams targeting taxpayers, including recent immigrants, as reported incidents of this crime continue to rise nationwide. These scams won't likely end with the filing season so the IRS urges everyone to remain on guard.

The IRS will always send taxpayers a written notification of any tax due via the U.S. mail. The IRS never asks for credit card, debit card or prepaid card information over the telephone. For more information or to report a scam, go to www.irs.gov and type "scam" in the search box.

People have reported a particularly aggressive phone scam in the last several months. Immigrants are frequently targeted. Potential victims are threatened with deportation, arrest, having their utilities shut off, or having their driver's licenses revoked. Callers are frequently insulting or hostile - apparently to scare their potential victims.

Potential victims may be told they are entitled to big refunds, or that they owe money that must be paid immediately to the IRS. When unsuccessful the first time, sometimes phone scammers call back trying a new strategy.

Other characteristics of this scam include:

- Scammers use fake names and IRS badge numbers. They generally use common names and surnames to identify themselves.
- Scammers may be able to recite the last four digits of a victim's Social Security number.
- Scammers spoof the IRS toll-free number on caller ID to make it appear that it's the IRS calling.
- Scammers sometimes send bogus IRS emails to some victims to support their bogus calls.
- Victims hear background noise of other calls being conducted to mimic a call site.
- After threatening victims with jail time or driver's license revocation, scammers hang up and others soon call back pretending to be from the local police or DMV, and the caller ID supports their claim.

If you get a phone call from someone claiming to be from the IRS, here's what you should do:

- If you know you owe taxes or you think you might owe taxes, call the IRS at 1.800.829.1040. The IRS employees at that line can help you with a payment issue, if there really is such an issue.
- If you know you don't owe taxes or have no reason to think that you owe any taxes (for example, you've never received a bill or the caller made some bogus threats as described above), then call and report the incident to the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration at 1.800.366.4484.
- If you've been targeted by this scam, you should also contact the Federal Trade Commission and use their "FTC Complaint Assistant" at FTC.gov. Please add "IRS Telephone Scam" to the comments of your complaint.

Taxpayers should be aware that there are other unrelated scams (such as a lottery sweepstakes) and solicitations (such as debt relief) that fraudulently claim to be from the IRS.

The IRS encourages taxpayers to be vigilant against phone and email scams that use the IRS as a lure. 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. The IRS also does not ask for PINs, passwords or similar confidential access information for credit card, bank or other financial accounts. Recipients should not open any attachments or click on any links contained in the message. Instead, forward the e-mail to phishing@irs.gov.

More information on how to report phishing scams involving the IRS is available on the genuine IRS website, IRS.gov.

You can reblog the IRS tax scam alert via Tumblr.

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