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For information on fraud or to schedule a presentation about fraud related issues and prevention Contact:

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## Consumer Advisory

### I'm the Taxman, Yeah, I'm the Taxman

Filing day is some months away, but while you're busy gathering all your documents, receipts, and bank records, identity thieves are scheming ways to get your tax refund and steal your identity. January 13<sup>th</sup> begins Tax Identity Theft Awareness Week. Here are some tips to make your tax season... *less taxing*.

- 1. FILE EARLY** The earlier you file, the more likely you'll get your refund before the fraudsters.
- 2. FILING ONLINE** Make sure your internet connection is secure. No going to Starbucks or public Wifi to file. Those connections are not secure, making that coffee shop more than a latte stop.
- 3. DON'T MAIL FROM HOME** – What's that you say? The "flag up" on your mailbox is a signal for fraudsters saying: "Hey, all my private tax information is in this envelope including my social security number and bank records. Come and get it!"
- 4. EMAILS FROM IRS** Don't believe them! Tax identity thieves may send phoney "phishing" emails or texts. The emails look like they are coming from the IRS, but know this: The IRS doesn't email or text people and will never request personal information over the internet. If the IRS does need to contact you, it will be through the mail. But, just to make sure the request is legitimate, call the IRS directly.
- 5. CHECK YOUR MAILBOX** Fraudsters love to beat you to your mailbox. Especially if there may be checks arriving. The best way to keep a fraudster away from your refund check is to request your return be automatically deposited into your bank account.
- 6. CHECK YOUR TAX PREPARERS QUALIFICATIONS** Know who is helping you file. If you are using an outside source to help you file:
  - All paid tax preparers must have a Preparer Tax Identification Number (PTIN). In addition, ask if the preparer is affiliated with a professional organization and attends continuing education classes.
  - Check the preparer's history with the Better Business Bureau and check for any disciplinary actions and licensure status through the state boards of accountancy for certified public accountants; the state bar associations for attorneys; and the IRS Office of Enrollment for enrolled agents.
- 7. SUSPECT SOMETHING?** If your tax records are not affected by identity theft, but you believe you may be at risk due to a lost or stolen purse or wallet, questionable credit card activity or credit report, contact the IRS Identity Protection Specialized Unit at 800-908-4490.

### \*\*\*UPDATE CURRENT SCAM ALERT \*\*\*

Local business owners report receiving a call from someone claiming to be with Xcel Energy or the IRS. The business owner is directed to handle a past due account by purchasing a Green Dot Pre-paid Card and providing the PIN number of the card to the bogus IRS or Xcel energy rep. Once the fraudster has that PIN number, the money is stolen and the consumer is out of luck as Green Dot cards are untraceable.