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## Consumer Advisory

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

I sent this advisory last year, but it bears repeating as there has been an increase in IRS Imposter schemes. 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. 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. Don't use a public Wifi to file. Those connections are not secure, making that coffee shop more than a latte stop. Also, use a unique password if you are filing with Turbo Tax.
- 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 AND CALLS FROM IRS** Don't believe them! Tax identity thieves are out to scare you. The scam occurs when citizens receive aggressive phone calls claiming to be from the IRS. Con artists use fake names and false IRS identification badge numbers in order to appear legitimate. Victims are told that they owe money to the IRS and it must be immediately paid through a prepaid debit card or wire transfer. If you want to be sure, the claim or 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.

**\*\*According to the IRS, the agency will not contact citizens and demand immediate payment without a written notice. The contacted party is given the opportunity to dispute the outstanding tax claim and will never be asked to pay the amount owed through a specific means of payment over the phone. The IRS further claims that it will never threaten to bring in law enforcement authorities to have citizens arrested for not complying with an IRS agent.\*\***