

Identity Theft Information for Taxpayers and Victims

Internal Revenue Service

FS-2015-2, January 2015

Identity theft presents a challenge to businesses, organizations and governments, including the Internal Revenue Service. The IRS meets the challenge of tax-related identity theft and is making progress against it with an aggressive strategy of prevention, detection and victim assistance.

Tax-related identity theft remains a top priority for the IRS in 2015. This year, the IRS continues to take new steps and strong actions to protect taxpayers and help victims of identity theft and refund fraud.

Tax-related identity theft occurs when someone uses a stolen Social Security number to file a tax return to claim a fraudulent refund. A taxpayer's SSN can be stolen through a data breach, a computer hack or a lost wallet. Although identity theft affects a small percentage of tax returns, it can have a major impact on victims by delaying their refunds.

Here are some tips to protect you from becoming a victim, and steps to take if you think someone may have filed a tax return using your name and Social Security number:

Tips to protect you from becoming a victim of identity theft

- Don't carry your Social Security card or any documents that include your Social Security number (SSN) or Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN).
- Don't give a business your SSN or ITIN just because they ask. Give it only when required.
- Protect your financial information.
- Check your credit report every 12 months.
- Review your Social Security Administration earnings statement annually.
- Secure personal information in your home.
- Protect your personal computers by using firewalls and anti-spam/virus software, updating security patches and changing passwords for Internet accounts.
- Don't give personal information over the phone, through the mail or on the Internet unless you have initiated the contact or you are sure you know who you are dealing with.

Know the Warning Signs

Be alert to possible tax-related identity theft if you receive a notice from the IRS or learn from your tax professional that:

- More than one tax return was filed for you;
- You owe additional tax, have a refund offset or have had collection actions taken against you for a year you did not file a tax return;
- IRS records indicate you received more wages than you actually earned or
- Your state or federal benefits were reduced or cancelled because the agency received information reporting an income change.

Steps for Victims of Tax-Related Identity Theft

- All victims of identity theft should follow the recommendations of the Federal Trade Commission: File a report with the local police.
- File a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission at www.consumer.ftc.gov or the FTC Identity Theft hotline at 877-438-4338 or TTY 866-653-4261.
- Contact one of the three major credit bureaus to place a "fraud alert" on your account:
 - Equifax – www.equifax.com, 800-525-6285
 - Experian – www.experian.com, 888-397-3742
 - TransUnion – www.transunion.com, 800-680-7289
- Close any accounts that have been tampered with or opened fraudulently.

If your SSN has been compromised and you know or suspect you may be a victim of tax-related identity theft, take these additional steps:

- Respond immediately to any IRS notice; call the number provided.
- Complete IRS Form 14039, Identity Theft Affidavit. Use a fillable form at IRS.gov, print, then mail or fax according to instructions.
- Continue to pay your taxes and file your tax return, even if you must do so by paper.
- If you previously contacted the IRS and did not have a resolution, contact the Identity Protection Specialized Unit at 800-908-4490. We have teams available to assist.

The IRS has greatly reduced the time it takes to resolve identity theft cases but please know these are extremely complex cases, frequently touching on multiple issues and multiple tax years. It can be time consuming. A typical case can take about 120 days to resolve.

If you are unable to get your issue resolved and are experiencing financial difficulties, contact the Taxpayer Advocate Service toll-free at 877-777-4778.