

Department of Revenue urges staying alert for tax scams

It's never safe to let down your guard, the Oregon Department of Revenue warns. Scam tactics are always evolving and becoming more effective. Scammers try many different methods to trick people into giving them personal information or money.

The best way for taxpayers to view their account activity, balances and credits, and make payments directly to the Department of Revenue is through Revenue Online. It's secure and includes all the information necessary to verify account status and ensure payments are properly applied to the correct account. Go directly to oregon.gov/dor to find Revenue Online. Payment providers may provide links that appear to take you to the government site but just end up taking you to another area of the provider's site.

Scams mainly come in the form of a phone call, email, or

standard mail. Here are some tips to help you identify scam attempts.

- Scammers make unsolicited calls. Thieves call taxpayers claiming to be representatives of the Oregon Department of Revenue or other tax officials. They demand the victim pay a bogus tax bill and may use threats or a sense of urgency to con the victim into sending cash, usually through a pre-paid debit card or wire transfer. The Department of Revenue never uses methods like these when making calls.

Hang up on suspicious phone calls. No matter how urgent a message makes a situation sound, you can always hang up, call the Department of Revenue at their published phone numbers, 503-378-4988 or 800-356-4222 (toll-free), and know that you're dealing with an actual government employee.

- Scammers send letters.

Letters often contain legitimate logos, addresses, and phone numbers to fool you. Sometimes, these letters expose themselves as scams through blurry logos, misspellings, and poor grammar. Letters are usually in the form of a fake tax bill or claim an error with your account. Letters from the Department of Revenue will have information that is verifiable through our website using the identification number printed on each letter.

- Scammers set up fake websites. Some scams that start as unsolicited calls or letters may also try to send you to fake websites. These websites are designed to look like an official federal or state agency site. Remember that the Oregon Department of Revenue's web address will always begin with an "https://" designation and have the ".gov" extension. Look for these in the web address before entering finan-

cial information to make sure you're dealing with us directly.

For information on protecting yourself or what to do if you're a victim of identity theft, visit • www.irs.gov • www.consumer.ftc.gov • www.identitytheft.gov

People can visit oregon.gov/dor to get forms, check the status of their refund or make payments. Call 503-378-4988 or 800-356-4222 toll free or email questions.dor@oregon.gov for additional assistance. For hearing- or speech-impaired, call 800-886-7204.

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"However, if you had plans for Spring Break and will be leaving, we're not going to hold that against you," Rosinbaum said. "Continue with your plans."

Childcare will also be an issue for parents who unable to take care of their children as the school is closed.

Siuslaw School District has also anticipated that possibility. First, it will have childcare available at the district for teachers, first responders and healthcare workers.

"We're assuming that they're going to start seeing 24-hour shifts with limited time at home as things possibly pick up," Rosinbaum said. "They can bring their kids to us and we'll take care of them."

"But, there's a lot of other people in town that need childcare. What we're trying to do right now is to set up a group of people within our staff and community members to take care of small groups of no more than 10 children for certain hours a day, so people all across our community have some place to take their kids if they need to. That's our job."

The 10-student limit is to ensure that childcare is possible without overloading individuals, or risking the spread of COVID-19.

"We are trying to stop the spread of this, and getting lots of people together is contrary to what we're trying to do," Rosinbaum said.

The school is still working out logistics, but is reaching out to local churches and organizations that could host childcare events.

Beyond that, Siuslaw School District is also looking at helping the entire community — not just students.

"I have also directed School Resource Officer Brandon Bailey to let us know of any additional needs in the community," Rosinbaum said. "I anticipate a time where medicine is going to be put in people's hands without them leaving their homes. I anticipate a time when we need to feed more than just the first responders and the children. The community goes beyond just its students. We are planning for the worst and hoping for the best."

Food deliveries will also be available for first responders and healthcare workers in the first week, and the district is also looking at partnerships with organizations such as Food for Lane County to distribute food and goods to individuals who are in need.

As for paying district employees, Rosinbaum has as-

ured that all employees will continue to receive a paycheck, even if they must stay home due to illness.

The district has been planning for this possibility for weeks, going so far as to ensure all of its reserve fuel tanks are full.

"A week ago, we topped our tanks up in anticipation of this," Rosinbaum said. "Yesterday, we filled all of our buses full in anticipation. Tomorrow, we get fuel delivered, and we've changed from a biweekly fuel to a weekly fuel by our provider. And we are top of their list to keep fueled."

The fuel reserve could also act be used for first responders in the community, if the situation warrants it in the coming weeks.

As for right now, Brown's plans are to have Oregon schools closed for the next two weeks, and was not designed to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

"Schools are experiencing critical shortages in staff, and superintendents are concerned for school personnel who are at elevated risk such as those over age 60 and those with underlying medical issues," Brown said in a statement Thursday. "I want to be very clear: sending Oregon children home will not stop the spread of the coronavirus. While children are home, when at all possible, they should not be in the care of older adults or those with underlying health issues that are most at-risk from COVID-19."

However, the situation surrounding the outbreak has changed so drastically in the past week, that a two-week closure may be extended.

"It's certainly a lot easier to have the school open for everybody, including us," Rosinbaum said. "This doesn't make it less work for anybody at the school, this makes it 100 times more work."

In Rosinbaum's personal opinion, the school closures are important.

"Kids most certainly do get the virus, though a more mild case," he said. "They are just as contagious as anybody else. One kid spreading to another kid, taking them home to grandma, is a lot worse than just sending a kid without COVID-19 home to grandma."

The decision to close schools has been difficult.

"If we do this right, then it won't be as big a deal, and everybody will say the state panicked because nothing happened," he said. "But if we don't do it, we kill half the population of Florence, Ore. You tell me what the right decision is to do."

For more information on the district's plans, visit www.siuslaw.k12.or.us. For other questions, including volunteer opportunities, contact the district directly at 541-997-2651.

For the Mapleton school district, Superintendent Jodi O'Mara is still working on releasing details.

"A letter is being sent out to all students and their families with the plan for nutrition services and recommendations later today," O'Mara said in a statement on Friday. "Some staff will be scheduled to work next week to deep clean the common areas and help provide nutrition services to our students. The district will be providing nutrition services to our families using the bus routes. Details will be included in the letter being sent to parents. The letter will also be posted on the district website (mapleton.k12.or.us)."

Upriver families can sign up for the RemindApp: Mapleton Middle/High School: Text the message @ mapletonor to the number 81010 or 205-409-7578.

Mapleton Elementary School: Text the message @ mapletonel to the number 81010 or 205-409-7578.

More details on the Mapleton closure will be published next week.

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