

As tax season ramps up, be prepared for scams

Tax season is in full swing, which means criminals will go to great lengths to separate taxpayers from their money, identity or anything of value that is within their reach.

Scammers may offer seemingly legitimate “tax services” that are actually designed to steal an identity and tax refund.

Often times, criminals will lure victims in with an offer of larger write-offs or refunds. Such scams might include fake websites and tax forms that look like they belong to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) in order to trick unsuspecting taxpayers into providing personal information.

Warning Signs of an Online Tax Scam

- An email or link requesting personal and/or financial information, such as your name, social security number, bank or credit card account numbers or any additional security-related information.
- Emails containing various forms of threats or consequences if no response is received, such as additional taxes or blocking access to your funds.
- Emails from the IRS or federal agencies. The IRS will not contact anyone via email.
- Emails containing exciting offers, tax refunds, incorrect spelling, grammar or odd phrasing throughout.
- Emails discussing “changes to tax laws.” These

email scams typically include a downloadable document (usually in PDF format) that purports to explain the new tax laws. However, unbeknownst to many, these downloads are almost always populated with malware that, once downloaded, will infect a computer.

How to Avoid Being the Victim

- Never send sensitive information in an email. Information sent through email can be intercepted by criminals. Make sure to consistently check financial account statements and credit reports for any signs of unauthorized activity.
- Secure your computer. Ensure your computer has the latest security updates

installed. Check that antivirus and anti-spyware software are running properly and receiving automatic updates from the vendor. If not already done, install and enable a firewall.

- Carefully select sites visited. Safely searching for tax forms, advice on deductibles, tax preparers and other similar topics requires great caution. Never visit a site by clicking on a link sent in an email, found on someone’s blog or in an advertisement.
- Be wise with Wi-Fi. Wi-Fi hotspots are intended to provide convenient access to the internet, however, this convenience can come at a cost. Public Wi-Fi is not secure and is susceptible to eavesdropping by hackers.

Census from A1

These districts can expand or contract based on the number of individuals living there.

Oregon has had five U.S. Congressional Districts since 1982, and these district boundaries have been redrawn incorporating the new data collected after the 1990, 2000 and 2010 Censuses.

The importance of collecting accurate and current information is essential; in addition to representation, there are billions of dollars in funding allocated according to the numbers of individuals in a county or state.

The ultimate objective of the Census is to count everyone of all ages, college students living on campus, immigrants, non-residents, family members, roommates, newborns, renters, couch surfers and grandparents — anyone who lives at each address, effective April 1.

During the last Census in 2010, Lane County in particular, as well as rural areas in Douglas

County, had low response rates. The goal this year is to improve the number of responses in those areas, as well as in each county as a whole.

Accurate counts ensure that funding is equitably distributed among the 50 states, based on need and participation levels. Medicaid, the National School Lunch Program, Headstart and grants for special education, highway planning and construction also receive funding based on Census data.

One of the major concerns that has been shared by the public regarding participation in the Census is the fear that information gained will be used to target undocumented individuals and force them to leave the United States.

This scenario is unlikely and illegal, as Congress has made a point of protecting the information and individuals that participate.

That is because the U.S. Census Bureau is bound by law to protect respondents’ answers and keep them strictly confidential. The law

ensures that private information is never published and that answers cannot be used against participating individuals by any government agency or court.

These concerns were heightened last year when there was an attempt made by the federal administration to add a question regarding citizenship status to the 2020 Census.

The response from the public, government officials and the courts were overwhelmingly opposed to the idea and, after months of insisting on the inclusion, the administration dropped its demand.

The idea that every household in the country will be contacted and interviewed has been a focus of the federal government and the founding fathers since the beginning of the U.S. republic.

The mandate to count every person in America is codified in Article

1, Section 2, of the U.S. Constitution and the nationwide count has taken place every 10 years since 1790. The first Census was conducted by riders on horseback and was one of the first things Congress instructed the new government to do.

The methodology used to obtain Census data has changed during the past 200 years, but the importance of the count has only increased over that time period.

Respondents to the 2020 Census can fill out the questionnaire for their household online, via mobile device, by telephone or by simply answering the questions asked by a Census taker at their home.

Census takers can be identified by a valid ID badge, with photograph, a U.S. Department of Commerce watermark and an expiration date.

For more information on the 2020 U.S. Census, visit 2020census.gov.

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