



Tax refund fraud is the largest and fastest growing segment in identity theft crimes, and with tax season upon us, it's essential to recognize the warning signs and avoid becoming a victim.

Tax fraud occurs when criminals use a stolen Social Security Number to file a refund with the IRS in the victim's name. Identity thieves who filed fraudulent tax claims using stolen information got away with over \$6 billion. Victims usually only learn of the crime after having the legitimate return rejected because a fraudster filed a fictitious claim first.

One of the biggest indicators that you might be a target for tax fraud is when companies or individuals ask repeatedly or pressure you to provide personal information. The IRS does not ask for PINs, passwords or confidential access information, nor does it contact taxpayers via email to request personal or financial information. This includes any type of electronic communication, such as text messages and social media platforms. Additional warning signs include:

- More than one tax return filed using your Social Security Number.
- Owing additional tax, refund offset, or have had collection actions taken against you for a year you did not file a tax return.
- IRS records indicating you have received wages or other income from an employer for whom you did not work.

Reduce the risk of tax fraud or tax-related identity theft.

Protecting your personal information is paramount to eliminating tax fraud and identity theft. Several important actions that can be taken to drastically reduce these risks include;

- File your taxes right away to help reduce the risk of being targeted.
- Install security software with firewall and anti-virus/spam protections on your personal computers and change account passwords often.
- Learn to recognize phishing scams—threatening calls, texts, or emails from people posing as legitimate organizations—so you can avoid them.
- Familiarize yourself with the “Dirty Dozen”, a list compiled annually by the IRS alerting taxpayers to a variety of popular scams.
- Do not 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 with whom you are dealing.
- Do not carry your Social Security card in your wallet or purse. Make sure your tax records and personal data are kept in a secure place.
- Check your credit report for abnormalities every three months or any account helps with the mitigation of impersonation scams).