

## **Identity Theft**

### **What?**

Identity theft happens when someone uses your personal information without your permission. The IRS has had problems with criminals filing fraudulent tax returns using stolen Social Security numbers.

### **How does it happen?**

Commonly, the identity thief steals your Social Security number and files for a tax refund early in the tax season. When you go to file your taxes, you receive a notice that you have already filed.

### **How to help prevent identity theft:**

Identity theft cannot be completely prevented. But there are things you can do to help:

- Do not reply. **To emails or texts from the IRS.** The IRS does not send emails or text messages requesting sensitive information. If you receive suspicious emails, you can report them to the IRS by sending an e-mail to: [phishing@irs.gov](mailto:phishing@irs.gov).
- Be suspicious of links sent by e-mail or text message. If unsure, do not click.
- Do not trust the authenticity of phone numbers and emails or texts.
- Do not send files with sensitive information as e-mail attachments. This is true even if you are sending it to a trusted person. You should use a file sharing service that encrypts the file.
- Be suspicious of phone calls asking for personal information. This is especially true of calls claiming to be from the IRS. The IRS will first contact you by sending a written notice. If you get an IRS notice, first determine if the notice is legitimate.
- Be suspicious of offers that seem too good to be true. Some scams promise fake awards/benefits, so do not give them personal information.
- Do not carry your Social Security number with you. Keep it in a secure location. Protect your computers with firewall, encryption and antivirus, anti-spam software.
- Use strong passwords and change them regularly. Longer passwords are better than shorter ones, using 12 characters at a minimum.
- Shred all documents containing personal information. If you are required to retain the document, then put it in a safe area where it cannot be accessed.
- Check your credit report regularly.

### **What if it happens to you?**

- File an identity theft affidavit. IRS Form 140390.
- Call the IRS Identity Theft Specialized Unit at 800-908-4490.
- If your purse or wallet containing personal information is stolen, contact all credit cards to cancel.
- Contact the credit bureaus about a fraud alert at the following numbers:
  - Equifax: 800-525-6285.
  - Experian: 888. 397-3742.
  - TransUnion: 800-680-7289.
- If your Social Security number has been stolen, notify the Social Security Office of Inspector General at 800-269-0271.
- The Federal Trade Commission has a toll-free identification theft helpline at 877-438-4338.

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