



Tax ID Theft: Protection is a Year-Round Effort

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MADISON – The tax season is an exciting time for taxpayers and criminals alike. While the vast majority of consumers will file their taxes and receive any refunds due without incident, an unlucky few will learn during the process that returns have already been filed in their names by scammers.

If you run into problems when you file, you may be a victim of tax identity theft. The following are indications that someone may have misused your identity to file a fraudulent return:

- multiple returns were filed under your Social Security number,
- you receive a letter or refund check regarding a return you did not file, or
- you owe additional taxes or are facing collection actions for a year you did not file a return.

The risk of tax identity theft is very real in Wisconsin. In recent years, tax identity theft has been a key element of identity theft complaints received by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP). Notably, tax identity theft was a factor in 75% of the identity theft complaints filed in 2016.

“The best way to protect yourself from the risk of tax identity theft is to keep your financial and personally identifiable information (such as your Social Security number, driver’s license number, bank account numbers, etc.) under lock and key throughout the year,” said Michelle Reinen, Director of the Bureau of Consumer Protection.

Before you file, you can check whether a 2017 Wisconsin income tax return has been filed in your name by visiting the Wisconsin Department of Revenue website (<https://revenue.wi.gov>; click on the “Online Services” link at the top of the homepage).

If you believe that you may be the victim of tax identity theft, report the suspected fraud by phone to the IRS (1-800-829-0433) and the Wisconsin Department of Revenue (1-608-266-2486). DATCP’s Consumer Protection Bureau offers a Tax ID Theft packet online (<https://datcp.wi.gov>) to assist consumers with next steps to protect against additional harm, and callers to the agency’s Consumer Protection Hotline (1-800-422-7128) can inquire about ways to further protect their identities.

(NOTE: The IRS advises taxpayers to continue paying their taxes and filing their returns even if they suspect that they may be victims of identity theft.)

Protect yourself when you file your taxes:

- If filing your return online, make sure your operating system and antivirus software are up to date and set up strong passwords for your tax software login.
- If you are working with a tax preparation service and see any questionable practices, report the suspicious behavior to DATCP.
 - Questionable practices might include tax returns being filed on your behalf without your consent, not receiving copies of documents that you signed, or not receiving copies of documents that identify the terms of a transition.

During the year, follow these simple tips to protect your personally identifiable information:

- Limit the personal details you share online.
- Avoid giving out sensitive information in response to unsolicited calls, emails or text messages.
- Shred unnecessary documents that contain personal information.

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- Don't carry cards containing sensitive details like your Social Security or Medicare numbers unless you specifically need them (for an appointment, for example).
- The IRS, United States Treasury and Wisconsin Department of Revenue will NEVER call and threaten you with arrest or legal action about back taxes. Any phone calls of this nature are scams.
- Use online security best practices:
 - Learn how to recognize phishing emails and text messages.
 - Never click on links that could redirect you to imposter websites that appear legitimate.
 - Never download attachments in emails from unknown senders or in emails that seem suspicious.

For additional information or to file a complaint, visit the Consumer Protection Bureau at datcp.wisconsin.gov, call the Consumer Protection Hotline at 1-800-422-7128 or send an e-mail to datcph hotline@wisconsin.gov.

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