

IRS warns against scams targeting seniors; joins other federal agencies to recognize special awareness day

Washington — As part of continuing efforts to protect the senior community, the Internal Revenue Service today issued a warning about the rising threat of impersonation scams.

These scams are targeting older adults by pretending to be government officials, aiming to steal sensitive personal information and money. By posing as representatives from agencies such as the IRS, or other government agencies, these fraudsters use fear and deceit to exploit their victims.

“Scammers often target seniors, attempting to steal personal information through phone calls, emails or text messages by pretending to be from the IRS or other agencies or businesses,” said IRS Commissioner Danny Werfel. “Preventing these types of scams requires assistance from many different places. By partnering with other federal agencies and others in the tax community, we can reach more seniors and other taxpayers to help protect them against these terrible scams.”

This is part of a wider effort taking place this week leading up to World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) on Saturday, June 15. WEAAD, observed since June 15, 2006, aims to foster a better understanding of the neglect and abuse faced by millions of older adults, focusing attention on the contributing cultural, social, economic and demographic factors.

The IRS also has been engaged in long-term efforts to protect against scams and other related schemes, including identity theft. This has been an ongoing focus of the Security Summit partnership between the IRS, state tax agencies and the nation’s tax professional community since 2015.

Understanding the threats

The IRS has identified a concerning trend where fraudulent actors are increasingly targeting unsuspecting individuals, particularly senior citizens, by masquerading as IRS agents. Victims are pressured into making immediate payments through unorthodox methods such as gift cards or wire transfers under the pretense of resolving fictitious tax liabilities or securing false refunds.

These scammers deploy advanced techniques to fabricate a veneer of credibility, including the manipulation of caller IDs to appear legitimate. Here are just a few examples of their schemes:

- **Impersonation of known entities:** Fraudsters often pose as representatives from government agencies — including the IRS, Social Security Administration and Medicare — others in the tax community or familiar businesses and charities. By spoofing caller IDs, scammers can deceive victims into believing they are receiving legitimate communications.
- **Claims of problems or prizes:** Scammers frequently fabricate urgent scenarios, such as outstanding debts or promises of significant prize winnings. Victims may be falsely informed that they owe the IRS money, are owed a tax refund, need to verify accounts or must pay fees to claim non-existent lottery winnings.
- **Pressure for immediate action:** These deceitful actors create a sense of urgency, demanding that victims take immediate action without allowing time for reflection. Common tactics include threats of arrest, deportation, license suspension or computer viruses to coerce quick compliance.
- **Specified payment methods:** To complicate traceability, scammers insist on unconventional payment methods, including cryptocurrency, wire transfers, payment apps or gift cards, and often require victims to provide sensitive information like gift card numbers.

Scam precautions and reporting

If an individual receives an unexpected call from someone alleging to be from the IRS, but they have not been notified by mail about any issues with their IRS account, they should hang up immediately. The call is likely from a scammer.

Do not return the call using the number provided by the caller or the one displayed on their caller ID. If taxpayers are uncertain about the legitimacy of IRS communications, they can contact IRS customer service for verification at 800-829-1040, or for the hearing impaired, TTY/TDD 800-829-4059.

To view details about an individual’s tax account, they can set up or check their IRS individual online account on [IRS.gov](https://www.irs.gov).

Electronic scams are also on the rise, with scammers sending malicious emails and texts posing as IRS representatives to steal personal information. The IRS reminds taxpayers that it does not initiate contact via email, text, or social media regarding tax bills or refunds.

Report the call or electronic scam by visiting the [Hotline page](#) of the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration and using an IRS Impersonation Scam Reporting form or by calling 800-366-4484. Forms to report different types of fraud are available on the [Hotline page](#) of Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration website. Taxpayers can click the appropriate option under "IRS Scams and Fraud" and follow the instructions.

Key points to remember:

Individuals should understand how and when the IRS contacts taxpayers to help them verify whether any communication they receive is genuinely from an IRS employee.

Most IRS communications are initiated through regular mail delivered by the United States Postal Service. However, in certain situations, the IRS may make phone calls or visit homes or businesses. These situations include having an overdue tax bill, an unfiled tax return or missing employment tax deposit.

Additionally, an IRS employee might review assets or inspect a business as part of a collection investigation, audit or ongoing criminal investigation.

Remember the following:

- The IRS will never demand immediate payment via prepaid debit cards, gift cards or wire transfers. Typically, if taxes are owed, the IRS will send a bill by mail first.
- The IRS will never threaten to involve local police or other law enforcement agencies.
- The IRS will never demand payment without allowing opportunities to dispute or appeal the amount owed.
- The IRS will never request credit, debit or gift card numbers over the phone.

Remaining vigilant and informed about these scams can help protect taxpayers from financial loss and identity theft. The IRS and partnering federal agencies urge everyone to be cautious, especially when dealing with unsolicited communications concerning taxes.

In March 2020, the U.S. Department of Justice introduced the National Elder Fraud Hotline to address fraud targeting elderly Americans and support affected individuals. If an individual has fallen victim to elder fraud, they can contact the National Elder Fraud Hotline at 833-FRAUD-11 (833-372-8311).

The hotline operates Monday through Friday, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Eastern Time, and services are available in English, Spanish, and other languages.