



Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration

Press Release

January 21, 2015

TIGTA - 2015-01

Contact: Office of Investigations

Call toll free: 1-800-366-4484

J. Russell George Urges Taxpayers to Be on "High Alert" to Phone Fraud Scam

TIGTA Reminds Taxpayers to Beware of Calls from IRS Impersonators this Filing Season

WASHINGTON — As the 2015 tax filing season begins, the Treasury Inspector General for Taxpayer Administration (TIGTA) is reminding taxpayers to beware of phone calls from individuals claiming to represent the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) in an effort to defraud them.

“It is critical that all taxpayers continue to be wary of unsolicited telephone calls from individuals claiming to be IRS employees,” said J. Russell George, Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration. “This scam, which is international in nature, has proven to be the largest scam of its kind that we have ever seen. The callers are aggressive, they are relentless and they are ruthless,” he said. “Once they have your attention, they will say anything to con you out of your hard-earned cash,” George added.

TIGTA has received reports of roughly 290,000 contacts since October 2013 and has become aware of nearly 3,000 victims who have collectively paid over \$14 million as a result of the scam, in which individuals make unsolicited calls to taxpayers fraudulently claiming to be IRS officials and demanding that they send them cash via prepaid debit cards.

“The increasing number of people not only receiving but accepting these unsolicited calls from individuals who fraudulently claim to represent the IRS is alarming,” George said. “At all times, and particularly during the tax filing season, we want to make sure that innocent taxpayers are alert to this scam so they are not harmed by these criminals,” he said, adding, “Do not become a victim.”

“This is a crime of opportunity, so the best thing you can do to protect yourself is to take away the opportunity,” the Inspector General added. “Do not engage with these callers. If they call you, hang up the telephone.”

Inspector General George noted that the scam has hit taxpayers in every State in the country. Callers claiming to be from the IRS tell intended victims they owe taxes and must pay using a pre-paid debit card or wire transfer. The scammers threaten those who refuse to pay with immediate arrest, deportation or loss of a business or driver’s license.

The IRS usually first contacts people by mail – not by phone – about unpaid taxes. And the IRS won’t ask for payment using a pre-paid debit card or wire transfer. The IRS also won’t ask for a credit card number over the phone.

“If someone unexpectedly calls claiming to be from the IRS and uses threatening language if you don’t pay immediately, that is a sign that it really isn’t the IRS calling,” George said.

The callers who commit this fraud often:

- Utilize an automated robocall machine.
- Use common names and fake IRS badge numbers.
- May know the last four digits of the victim’s Social Security Number.
- Make caller ID information appear as if the IRS is calling.
- Send bogus IRS e-mails to support their scam.
- Call a second or third time claiming to be the police or department of motor vehicles, and the caller ID again supports their claim.

If you get a call from someone claiming to be with the IRS asking for a payment, here’s what to do:

- If you owe Federal taxes, or think you might owe taxes, hang up and call the IRS at 800-829-1040. IRS workers can help you with your payment questions.
- If you don’t owe taxes, fill out the “IRS Impersonation scam” form on TIGTA’s website, www.treasury.gov/tigta or call TIGTA at 800-366-4484.
- You can also file a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission at www.FTC.gov. Add “IRS Telephone Scam” to the comments in your complaint.

TIGTA and the IRS encourage taxpayers to be alert for phone and e-mail scams that use the IRS name. The IRS will never request personal or financial information by e-mail, texting or any social media. You should forward scam e-mails to phishing@irs.gov. Don’t open any attachments or click on any links in those e-mails.

Taxpayers should be aware that there are other unrelated scams (such as a lottery sweepstakes winner) and solicitations (such as debt relief) that fraudulently claim to be from the IRS.