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## **Avoiding IRS Tax Scams**

*Michael Hermes, Tax Senior*

It's easy to feel intimidated when you're being contacted by the IRS, and con artists are exploiting that, convincing people into paying fabricated tax bills. It's important to use caution when viewing emails and receiving telephone calls supposedly from the IRS. Being victimized by a tax scam can be very costly; not only monetarily, but also in the amount of time and aggravation it can take to straighten out the mess.

The IRS has recently issued a warning about a rampant phone scam. The Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA) called it the largest scam of its kind. It has received reports of over 90,000 contacts related to this scam, and thousands of victims have paid over \$5 million to the offenders claiming to be from the IRS.

Typically, potential victims are told they owe money that must be paid promptly through a prepaid debit card or wire transfer. If they refuse to cooperate, they are threatened with arrest, deportation or suspension of their driver's license. Callers are frequently insulting or hostile, in order to intimidate their potential victims.

The offenders who run this scam will often:

- Use common names and fake IRS badge numbers.
- Know the last four digits of the victim's Social Security Number.
- Make caller ID appear as if the IRS is calling.
- Send bogus IRS emails to support the bogus calls.
- Make background noise of other calls being conducted to mimic a call site.
- Call a second time claiming to be the police or department of motor vehicles. The caller ID again appears to support their claim.

The IRS will never ask for credit card, debit card, prepaid card information, nor does it request a specific payment method for tax obligations over the phone. In addition, the IRS does not request immediate payment

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over the phone or take enforcement action immediately following a phone conversation. Taxpayers generally receive written notification of IRS enforcement action involving tax liens or levies.

If you receive a suspicious phone call from someone claiming to be from the IRS, and you think you may owe taxes, hang up and call the IRS at (800) 829-1040. If you don't owe taxes or have no reason to think you owe any taxes, hang up and call to report the incident to the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration at (800) 366-4484.

Anyone targeted by this scam, should also file a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission, using the "FTC Complaint Assistant" at [FTC.gov](https://www.ftc.gov), and adding "IRS Telephone Scam" to the comments portion of the complaint.

It is also important to be on the lookout for possible email scams that use the IRS as a lure. Be aware that the IRS does not initiate contact with taxpayers by email to request personal or financial information. This includes any type of electronic communication, such as text messages and social media channels. The IRS also does not ask for PINs, passwords, or similar confidential access information for credit card, bank, or other financial accounts via email or any other means.

If you receive a suspicious email, do not open any attachments or click on any links contained in the message. Instead, forward the email to [phishing@irs.gov](mailto:phishing@irs.gov).

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