

## Be On Guard Against Tax ID Theft

Tax season may have just begun, but identity thieves work all year long!

The IRS uses your Social Security Number (SSN) to make sure your filing is accurate and complete, and that you get any refund you're due. Unfortunately, identity thieves who have your SSN can file phony tax returns to get a refund from the IRS, or use your SSN to get a job or claim your child as a dependent.

Tax identity theft victims typically find out about the crime when they receive:

- IRS records (e.g. W-2 forms) showing wages from an employer they don't know;
- a letter from the IRS saying more than one return was filed in their name;
- a letter from the IRS saying the taxpayer received wages they didn't report.

While an unexpected notice or letter from the IRS could alert you that someone else is using your SSN, note that the IRS does not initiate contact with a taxpayer by sending an email, text or social media message that asks for personal or financial information. If you get such a text or email, don't reply or click on links.

If you think someone used your SSN for a tax refund or a job, or the IRS sends you a notice or letter indicating a problem, contact the IRS immediately. Specialists will work with you to get your tax return filed, get you any refund you are due, and protect your IRS account from identity thieves in the future. Contact the IRS Identity Protection Specialized Unit at 1-800-908-4490. Make a note of the dates of your calls and keep copies of all correspondence.

As with other types of ID Theft, file a police report and check your credit report for fraudulent accounts. You may also want to consider placing a fraud alert or security freeze on your credit reports.

### Reduce Your Risk

- Keep your financial and tax records secure. Use strong passwords and always use security software with firewall and anti-virus protections.
- Learn to recognize and avoid phishing emails along with calls and texts from thieves posing as banks, credit card companies or government agencies.
- Don't click on links or download attachments in texts or emails from unknown senders.

For more information on avoiding and addressing Identity Theft, or to obtain this information in an alternate format, contact us at 410-313-6420 or [consumer@howardcountymd.gov](mailto:consumer@howardcountymd.gov).