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## **Scam Alert – March 2009**

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### **Tax Season – An Identity Thief's Dream Come True**

Identity thieves are always looking for a golden opportunity to take your identity. Tax season is a prime time to give them that opportunity. Your tax documents contain every bit of information that they want, name and address, date of birth, social security number, and now with the benefit of direct deposits for your refund, they can also include your bank account and routing number. This is enough information for the thief to drain your bank account and to set up credit to ruin your good name.

Although this is a prime time for identity thieves, there are several ways of safeguarding your personal information during tax season. The following should assist you in taking a look at your own individual situation and to make the decision that works best for you.

#### **Tax Accountant**

When using a tax accountant, make sure to use someone you know and trust. Tax preparers should only be asking questions related to your income and allowable expenses. Be sure to ask questions before handing over your personal information. Some questions you may ask:

- Do you lock up all personal information?
- If processing electronically, do you routinely keep virus protectors updated?
- How many people in your company have access to my personal information?
- Do you share personal information with any telemarketers?
- Do you outsource any of your work?

If the answers to any of these questions make you feel uneasy, then consider doing business with someone else.

**Tax Software for home preparation**

If using a home tax program, be sure that you have an updated virus protector and firewall to prevent hackers from accessing your personal information over the internet. After you have e-filed or printed out all your tax documents for mailing, be sure to go back into the tax program and delete out your last name, address, date of birth and social security number. This way, if a hacker does penetrate your system later on, none of the personal information is still stored in the program.

**Mailing**

If you choose not to e-file your tax return and instead opt to mail your tax documents, try to make a point of not mailing them from your home. When placing your mail in your mailbox and raising the flag, you not only alert the postal employee that there are items in your mailbox for pick-up, but you also alert identity thieves that there could potentially be personal information in your mailbox for them to steal. Take the time to personally deliver your tax documents to the local post office and actually hand it to an employee working at the counter. If you are unable to take your documents to the post office, at least wait for your mail carrier and personally hand them the envelopes for mailing.

If you see someone other than the mail carrier taking mail out of your mailbox, or a neighbors, call your local law enforcement immediately.

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Stealing from your mailbox is not the only way identity thieves obtain information during tax season. They may also attempt to phone or email you claiming to be from the IRS and inform you that they need to verify the information in your tax return. **DON'T GIVE YOUR PERSONAL INFORMATION OUT OVER THE PHONE OR INTERNET.** The IRS will never phone or email you to ask for your personal information.

To report suspicious tax activity and possible scams, call the Office of the Treasury Inspector General at 1-800-829-1040.

***IDENTIFY A SCAM BEFORE A SCAM IDENTIFIES YOU***