

BEWARE OF TAX REBATE SCAMS

A legislative column by state Senator Mary Lazich (R-New Berlin)

The federal government has begun mailing and directly depositing economic stimulus checks to more than 130 million households. News of the check distributions has brought out the scammers. The National Crime Prevention Council isn't joking or exaggerating when it says scammers are out in full force attempting to separate you from your rebate check.

The scam begins with a simple telephone call or e-mail. Scammers claim to be from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) or Social Security Administration (SSA). They will tell you they need information in order to directly deposit your rebate into your account.

Then they will ask for personal data like your checking account number, Social Security number, and other personal or financial information they can then use to commit identify theft.

Similarly, you may receive an e-mail from a scammer asking you to call a specific phone number or to e-mail personal information.

Another telephone scam the IRS has discovered is a scammer claiming to be an IRS employee who says the IRS mailed you a rebate check. The scammer says that because the check has not been cashed, the IRS wants to confirm your bank account number. The IRS advises the scammer may have a foreign accent. The truth is the IRS never contacts taxpayers to confirm financial or personal information. It is left up to the individual taxpayer to cash a paper check.

The National Crime Prevention Council and the IRS advise you of the following:

- Neither the IRS nor the SSA will ever ask you for personal information over the telephone or through e-mail.
- Never give out such information over the telephone or through e-mail.
- If you get a telephone call from someone claiming to be from the SSA asking for personal information, say you are not interested, and then hang up.
- Then call the SSA's toll free number at 1-800-772-1213 to confirm the reason for the call and the caller's identity.
- If you receive an e-mail from someone claiming to be from the IRS, do not click any links.
- Forward the e-mail to phishing@irs.gov and then delete the e-mail.
- If you click on a link in an unsolicited e-mail, you could fall victim to identity theft.
- The only legitimate e-mail addresses for the IRS and SSA are, respectively, www.irs.gov and www.ssa.gov.

The National Crime prevention Council offers the easiest and best advice to avoid scams and prevent identity theft that will cost a great deal of time, aggravation and money:

“Your first reaction to being asked for personal information by someone you don’t know should always be to say ‘No!’”

If you have comments on this or any other issue, please contact me at Sen.Lazich@legis.wi.gov, Senator Mary Lazich, State Capitol, P.O. Box 7882 Madison, WI 53707 or 1-800-334-1442.