

# Tax Identity Theft Awareness

## Column

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*By Lauren Galley, Regional Director, Bryan/College Station Better Business Bureau*

Tax season has officially begun, and scammers may be looking to steal your identity and your refund. The Federal Trade Commission declared last week "Tax Identity Theft Awareness Week". This awareness week provides a great opportunity to learn more about what a tax scam looks like and how scammers can use your private information for profit.

It's important to know how identity theft happens. In tax identity theft, someone typically uses your social security number to get a job or a tax refund. In 2017 the IRS reported over 56,000 IRS imposters and over 400 tax related scams in Texas alone in 2018. More than 50 tax scams have already been reported to BBB across the United States in 2019 so far. But how do you know if you have been a target of this scam? You may go online to file your tax return and discover a return has already been filed using your social security number or you may receive a letter from the IRS stating that more than one return was filed under your name.

So how can you keep yourself safe? BBB recommends these tips:

- **Complete your refund as soon as possible.** Scammers usually file fast to beat the real taxpayer to the refund. The sooner you file, the less likely a scammer will be successful.
- **Pay attention to official communications.** Respond promptly to official written notices from the IRS about duplicate returns or other tax related issues.
- **Identify fake communications.** The IRS always sends written notifications first, so if you receive a call or email before an official letter, it's probably from a scammer pretending to contact you about past due taxes. Always be cautious of anyone who threatens you, the IRS will never do that.
- **Understand spam.** If you receive an email from the IRS, do not reply to the sender or click on links or attachments included in the email.
- **Protect your privacy.** Online accessibility to shopping and banking also means increased accessibility to your personal information, so be sure to take extra precautions against data breaches.
- **Employers should also exercise caution.** The IRS encourages company payroll officials to double check any unusual or executive-level requests for employee's personal information.

For more information on tax identity theft, visit [bbb.org](http://bbb.org).

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