

As the 2017 tax season gets underway, it is important take extra precaution when filing your return to prevent exposure to tax fraud.

Tax identity fraud takes place when a criminal files a false tax return using a stolen Social Security number in order to fraudulently claim the refund. Identity thieves generally file false claims early in the year and victims are unaware until they file a return and learn one has already been filed in their name.



To help prevent tax ID fraud, read the following tips:

- **File early.** File your tax return as soon as you're able, giving criminals less time to use your information to file a false return.
- **File on a protected Wi-Fi network.** If you're using an online service to file your return, be sure you're connected to a password-protected personal network. Avoid using public networks like a Wi-Fi hotspot at a coffee shop.
- **Use a secure mailbox.** If you're filing by mail, drop your tax return at the post office or an official postal box instead of your mailbox at home. Some criminals look for completed tax return forms in home mailboxes during tax season.
- **Find a tax preparer you trust.** If you're planning to hire someone to do your taxes, get recommendations and research a tax preparer thoroughly before handing over all of your financial information.
- **Shred what you don't need.** Once you've completed your tax return, shred the sensitive documents that you no longer need and safely file away the ones you do.
- **Beware of phishing scams by email, text or phone.** Scammers may try to solicit sensitive information by impersonating the IRS. Know that the IRS will not contact you by email, text or social media. If the IRS needs information, they will contact you by mail first.
- **Keep an eye out for missing mail.** Fraudsters look for W-2s, tax refunds or other mail containing your financial information. If you don't receive your W-2s, and your employer indicates they've been mailed, or it looks like it has been previously opened upon delivery, contact the IRS immediately.

More information about tax identity theft is available from the FTC at ftc.gov/taxidtheft and the IRS at irs.gov/identitytheft.