



Board of County Commissioners | Consumer Protection Agency

Quick Fact:

*Income tax crimes cost the federal government close to \$350 billion a year.**

National Consumer Protection Week

Tip Of The Day

Beware of Tax Time Ripoffs & Scams

It may seem like everyone wants to help you file your taxes or get your refund immediately, but be careful of these offers or you could lose some of your hard-earned money and be the victim of identity theft.

Tax Refund Anticipation Loans (RALs)

Some tax return preparers offer what they may call 'instant', 'express' or 'fast money' refunds. These refunds are actually high interest rate loans borrowed against the amount of your anticipated refund. These loans must be repaid even if you don't get your refund, or if the refund is smaller than anticipated. To avoid the temptation of getting a Refund Anticipation Loan:

- File your tax return electronically and have your refund deposited directly into your bank account. This can speed up your refund, and may be deposited in as few as 8-15 days.
- Open a bank account if you don't have one. Many banks offer low-cost savings accounts.
- Ask for a fast refund by e-filing and having the refund deposited to a prepaid card, including any existing payroll or prepaid card that the taxpayer already has.
- Visit a Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) site. Call 1-800-TAX-1040 or visit www.tax-coalition.org to find one near you.

Reduce Your Risk Of Identity Theft

- Store your tax paperwork in a safe and secure location, and shred any paperwork you no longer need.
- Use updated firewall, antivirus and spyware software if you are filing your taxes online.
- Monitor your mail closely during tax season for everyone who pays you, including employers, banks and brokerages, to make sure you receive copies of what they send to the IRS.
- Choose your tax professionals as carefully as you would a doctor or lawyer, since a tax preparer has access to your Social Security Number, address and other private financial information.

Be Aware Of IRS-Related Scams

- If you receive an unsolicited e-mail asking for your personal or financial information, delete it or send it to the FTC at spam@uce.gov for investigation.
- The IRS will never e-mail taxpayers about issues related to their accounts or ask for their Social Security number or financial details over the phone.
- If you have any doubt whether a contact from the IRS is authentic, call 1-800-829-1040 to confirm it.
- Add a "Credit Freeze" or "Fraud Alert" on your credit report at the three major credit bureaus to help you avoid identity theft. This stops identity thieves in their tracks by locking your credit down and preventing lenders from offering new credit in your name unless they verify your identity via phone or e-mail.

For more information on tax scams and how to protect yourself, visit this IRS site -

www.irs.gov/newsroom/article/0,,id=98269,00.html

*Cornell University

Be an educated consumer!

Visit www.hillsboroughcounty.org/consumerprotection

Hillsborough County Consumer Protection Agency | 813-903-3430