



Beat ID Thieves to Your Tax Return

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Editor's Note: Tax Identity Theft Awareness Week is January 28 to February 1. This annual campaign aims to inform consumers about the threat of tax-related identity theft and scams.

MADISON – Tax season comes as a relief for folks who rely on a return to pay down bills, make a major purchase, or build a savings. But it is also a time when the damage from identity theft becomes very real for some taxpayers as they discover that identity thieves have filed returns in their names using information they stole during the year. Most consumers will not face any issues, but the unlucky few who are tax identity theft victims will have to wait on their money and may have to jump through some hoops to get their returns.

There are a number of scenarios that a tax filer could face which might indicate that this crime has occurred including:

- multiple returns were filed under your Social Security number,
- you receive a letter or refund check regarding a return you did not file, or
- you owe additional taxes or are facing collection actions for a year you did not file a return.

“Tax identity theft is a serious concern nationwide,” said Lara Sutherlin, Administrator for the Division of Trade and Consumer Protection within the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP). “People can help combat this crime by protecting their information throughout the year, filing their taxes early to get a jump on identity thieves, and reporting questionable tax preparation practices to our agency.”

Before you file your 2018 taxes, you can check whether an income tax return has already been filed in your name by visiting the Wisconsin Department of Revenue website (<https://revenue.wi.gov>; click on the “Online Services” link at the top of the homepage).

If you believe that you may be the victim of tax identity theft, report the suspected fraud by phone to the IRS (1-800-829-0433) and the Wisconsin Department of Revenue (1-608-266-2486). DATCP offers a [Tax ID Theft packet](#) to assist consumers with next steps to protect against additional harm, and callers to the agency’s Consumer Protection Hotline (1-800-422-7128) can inquire about ways to further protect their identities. The Department of Revenue also offers a [webpage](#) with educational resources for taxpayers about identity-related issues.

(NOTE: The IRS advises taxpayers to continue paying their taxes and filing their returns even if they suspect that they may be victims of identity theft.)

Take protective measures when you file your taxes:

- File early in the season to get a jump on a thief who may have your information.
- If filing your return online, make sure your operating system and antivirus software are up to date, and set up strong passwords for your tax software login.
- If you are working with a tax preparation service and witness any questionable practices, report the suspicious behavior to DATCP.
 - Questionable practices might include tax returns being filed on your behalf without your consent, not receiving copies of documents that you signed, or not receiving copies of documents that identify the terms of a transaction.

By the time an identity thief has misused your information to file a return, the damage has already been done. It is imperative that consumers take steps to protect their personal and financial information throughout the year in order to keep those details from falling into the wrong hands. Follow these simple tips to protect your information:

- Limit the personal details you share online.
- Avoid giving out sensitive information in response to unsolicited calls, emails or text messages.
- Shred unnecessary documents that contain personal information.
- The IRS, United States Treasury and Wisconsin Department of Revenue will NEVER call and threaten you with arrest or legal action about back taxes. Any calls of this nature are scams.
- Use online security best practices:
 - Learn how to recognize phishing emails and text messages.
 - Never click on links that could redirect you to imposter websites that appear legitimate.
 - Never download attachments in emails from unknown senders or in suspicious emails.

For additional information or to file a complaint, visit the Consumer Protection Bureau at datcp.wi.gov, call the Consumer Protection Hotline at 1-800-422-7128 or send an e-mail to datcphotline@wi.gov.

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