

Dept. of Revenue: Calls on taxpayers to help fight identity theft

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It is National Consumer Protection Week, and the Wisconsin Department of Revenue (DOR) is asking taxpayers to help in the fight against cybercrime by doing their part to protect their personal information.

The thousands of hours DOR invested in staff training and developing identity theft detection technologies used to protect taxpayer's personal information led to [stopping more than \\$55 million](#) in fraudulent and erroneous refunds last tax season.

But DOR cannot secure taxpayers' personal information alone. Taxpayers also must be vigilant in ensuring their personal information does not end up in the wrong hands.

"Protecting taxpayers' personal identities is paramount in everything we do at DOR, and it requires a team effort," said Wisconsin Department of Revenue Secretary Peter Barca. "We need individuals to join us in protecting their identities. When we are all invested, know the threats and actively defend against them, identity theft opportunities decrease."

One thing everyone should know is neither DOR nor the IRS will initiate contact with taxpayers by email, text messages or social media to request personal or financial information. Beyond this vital tip are a list of best practices taxpayers should know and use through the 2020 tax season and beyond.

Secure electronic devices

- Keeping electronic devices protected with up-to-date firewall, malware and anti-virus software.

- Encrypt tax and other sensitive records stored on your electronic devices.
- Use strong and unique passwords for online tax preparation account.
- Use two-factored authentication, if offered.
- Never send tax information through unencrypted email or a public Wi-Fi connection.
- Be careful with games, memes and social media accounts that could expose information used in security questions, like mother's maiden name, name of the road you grew up on or first pet.

Choose a reputable tax preparer

- Be wary of tax return preparers who:
 - o Claim they can get larger refunds than others.
 - o Base their fees on a percentage of the refund.
 - o Offer to deposit your refund into their financial account.
- Use a tax professional who:
 - o Enters their preparer tax identification number on the tax return.
 - o Signs the tax return.
 - o Provides you a copy of the return.
- Consider whether the individual or firm will be around for months or years after filing the return to answer questions about the preparation of the tax return.
- Ask the preparer:
 - o How it will handle and store your information.
 - o What computer security they use.
 - o If the person working on your taxes has undergone a thorough background screening.

Guard personal information

- Monitor personal accounts. Don't assume unexpected collections or other DOR notices are errors. They may be a sign of identity theft.
- Check if a 2019 Wisconsin individual income tax return was filed [on DOR's website](#).
- Don't give out personal information unless you're sure who you're giving it to.
- Don't routinely carry your Social Security card.
- Keep your mailing address current with government agencies and others who send you sensitive information.
- Consider getting a mail box with a lock.
- Retrieve your mail daily.
- Monitor for missing mail.
- Keep paper documents in a safe and locked location.
- Shred unneeded sensitive documents before disposing of them.
- Check your credit report at least once a year.
- Review wage earnings on your Social Security Administration statement and report any discrepancies.