



It's Tax Time: Protect your Identity

Tax time is here again and most of us are collecting the appropriate documents in an effort to complete our returns, especially those of us expecting a refund. With personal information included on most documents, like your W-2 (wages earned) and 1099 series documents (tax paid or earned) mailed to you, there is a need for more concern. Protecting your identity can be easier than you think.

Here are some examples of how to minimize your risk for identity theft:

- **Your Mailbox**

Use a mailbox that locks or consider having your mail sent to a Post Office Box. Try to retrieve your mail daily. Uncollected mail is an invitation for identity thieves. Deposit your mail in an official mailbox preferably inside the Post Office. Never leave outgoing mail in your personal mailbox or mailboxes at work.

- **Address Changes**

If you have moved within the tax year, notify any payers of your new address. Do not rely solely on the Postal Service change of address process to notify everyone you may expect tax documents from.

- **Paper Security**

Keep tax paperwork in a safe, locked location. When you must travel with them, place them out of sight like in the trunk of your car until you can deliver them safely to your tax preparer or to your home for safe storage.

- **Shred, Shred, Shred**

Place papers you no longer need that contain personal information such as social security number, account numbers, etc through a crosscut shredder.

- **Your Computer**

If you are using your computer to file or store your tax return, be sure it is protected. Make sure it is protected with up-to-date antivirus, firewall and spy-ware software to protect you from invasion. Be sure to update these security programs daily for the greatest protection.

- **Tax Preparers and Personal Privacy**

Know the company or individual that will be preparing your tax return. Investigate with the Better Business Bureau, especially if they are new or appear to provide seasonal services. Contact the Wisconsin Consumer Protection Hotline at 800-422-7128, to find out if there are any complaints against them if you are not sure. Ask the business how your information will be handled and stored, what computer security is used, and if the person working on your taxes has undergone a thorough background screening. Trust your instincts, if you feel uncomfortable or doubt the company's commitment to protecting your privacy, take your business to a company you can trust.

- **Watch out for Tax Time Scams**

If you receive an email asking for your Social Security Number or other personal information, delete it or forward it to the Federal Trade Commission at spam@uce.gov for investigation. The IRS does not send emails asking for information or to inform you of anything. Likewise, banks do not request personal information by sending you an email or calling you on the telephone. If you haven't initiated contact, don't give out personal information to anyone. If you have questions about correspondence you receive from the IRS, immediately call the IRS Taxpayers Advocates at 877-777-4778.

- **Employment Identity**

There are many types of identity theft other than the well-known financial identity theft. Sometimes identity thieves use your identity to get a job. They may be employed and using your Social Security Number –or your child's Social Security Number. In the case where they are using your number, you or your employer may receive notification from the IRS indicating that more than one person is using your number, or you owe back taxes. Or worse, your disability or your minor child's disability benefits have been stopped due to an increase in your income. If this happens, immediately contact the IRS Taxpayers Advocate number listed above, or contact our office. Make a habit of comparing your W-2 wage earning statement you receive from your employer with the Social Security Administration Statement you receive annually to be sure the amounts match exactly. If the amounts do not match it may indicate someone is working in your name or it can indicate an error in reporting. Either way, contact the Social Security Administration at www.ssa.gov to report any discrepancies.

If you believe your identity has been stolen, contact the Wisconsin Office of Privacy Protection at 1-800-422-7128 or email us at DATCPWisconsinPrivacy@Wisconsin.gov Visit our website at www.privacy.wi.gov for more information.