



## 7 Tips to Prevent Tax Identity Fraud

As Americans begin the process of filing tax returns, identity thieves are scheming to get their hands on that money. Tax identity theft has been the most common form of identity theft reported to the Federal Trade Commission for the past five years.

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 that one has already been filed in their name.

"Fraudsters are continuously coming up with new methods, but older tactics such as Tax ID fraud is still frequently utilized today. These seven tips are an important reminder to help us all fight back against the fraudsters," says Erica Fowler, Information Security Officer at United.

- **File early.** File your tax return as soon as you are able, giving criminals less time to use your information to file a false return.
- **File on a protected Wi-Fi network.** If you are 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 are 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 are 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 have 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 do not receive your W-2s, and your employer indicates they have been mailed, or it looks like it has been previously opened upon delivery, contact the IRS immediately.

If you believe you are a victim of tax identity theft or if the IRS denies your tax return because one has previously been filed under your name, alert the IRS Identity Protection Specialized Unit at 1-800-908-4490. In addition, you should:

- **Respond immediately to any IRS notice** and complete IRS Form 14039, Identity Theft Affidavit.
- **Contact your bank immediately**, and close any accounts opened without your permission or tampered with.
- **Contact the three major credit bureaus** to place a 'fraud alert' on your credit records:
  - Equifax, [www.Equifax.com](http://www.Equifax.com), 1-800-525-6285
  - Experian, [www.Experian.com](http://www.Experian.com), 1-888-397-3742
  - TransUnion, [www.TransUnion.com](http://www.TransUnion.com), 1-800-680-7289
- **Continue to pay your taxes** and file your tax return, even if you must do so by paper.