



8 TIPS FROM THE AICPA TO PROTECT YOU AND YOUR FAMILY FROM TAX-RELATED IDENTIFY THEFT

The following information from SC&H Group reviews eight tips from the American Institute of CPAs (AICPA) to protect you and your family from tax-related identity theft.

Tax-related identity theft continues to be an ever-growing crisis with no signs of slowing. According to the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration, the IRS identified [\\$227 million claimed](#) in fraudulent refunds during the first two months of the 2016 tax season alone. In another staggering example, over 2.4 million taxpayers were impacted by fraudulent refunds in tax year 2013, according to the Government Accountability Office (GAO).

To make matters worse, cybercriminals are becoming more sophisticated. For instance, earlier this year, the IRS and state tax agencies issued an alert to employers about an elaborate [Form W-2 phishing](#) email scam. In this year's version, the scam includes a new twist that can maximize the amount of information and money that cybercriminals can steal from organizations.

As cybercrime evolves, and the methods cybercriminals use grow in complexity, how can you protect yourself and your family from becoming a victim of identity theft?

IDENTIFY THEFT PREVENTION TIPS

It always pays to be hyper-vigilant. The AICPA recently shared proactive steps to take and resources to review to protect you and your family from tax-related identify theft. These eight tips include:

1. **Secure Private Personal Information:** Safeguard family names and birthdates, account numbers, passwords, and Social Security numbers. Carefully consider all requests to provide your Social Security number before giving it out, and don't hesitate to ask why your private information is being requested. Secure your Social Security card in a safe or safety deposit box and never in your purse or wallet. Additionally, proactively shred all documents that contain personal data before disposing of them - even solicitations and "junk" mail may unknowingly contain account numbers and personal information.
2. **Monitor Personal Information Shared on Social Media:** Cybercriminals methodically gather data from online sources, including commonly used identifiers such as birthdate, maiden name, pet name, hometown, significant other, and/or children's information. Be cautious who you communicate with online and be selective before accepting electronic invitations from people you do not know or recognize. Separate what you post publicly from what you post with your personal contacts. Do not post personal and family data.

3. **Secure Your Computer:** Use current versions of antivirus, malware protection, and firewalls and update these programs frequently. Consider having this software updated automatically, as well as using different computers for business and finances than you do for social media and personal matters. Use strong passwords, change them frequently, and do not share them with others.
4. **Beware of Impersonators:** Criminals utilize sophisticated computer technology, such as dialers and automated questions, to contact thousands of targets daily. Do not provide personal information to callers you do not know. If any caller requests that you verify personal information, be extremely cautious and ask for further confirmation of their identity, such as their telephone number, website, email address, supervisor's name, and mailing address. The IRS never initiates contact by telephone.
5. **Beware of Unsolicited Emails and Current Phishing Scams:** Don't open attachments or electronic links unless you know the sender. Internet sites should have a lock symbol to show the site is encrypted. Always beware of entering sensitive data. Forward emails received from IRS impersonators to phishing@irs.gov. The IRS never initiates contact by email, text message, or social media channels.
6. **Monitor Your Personal Information:** Review your bank and credit card statements often.
7. **Consider Electronic Transmission of Financial Information:** No sensitive tax or personal information should be sent via unsecured email, even information being transmitted to CPAs, bankers, and/or financial advisors. A secure portal, encrypted email, or physical mailing of sensitive information is necessary.
8. **Order Your Free Annual Credit Report:** Call 1-877-322-8228 or go to www.annualcreditreport.com to request your report and/or search for creditors you do not know. Choose to use only the last four digits of your Social Security number on your report. Consider placing a credit card freeze on your account so only creditors you approve are allowed to access your file.

DESPITE PREVENTION EFFORTS, YOU'VE BEEN VICTIMIZED BY TAX-RELATED IDENTIFY THEFT – NOW WHAT?

The unfortunate reality is that personal data is constantly at risk. You may discover your identity has been stolen if you:

- Find purchases on your credit card that you did not make.
- Discover withdrawals from an account that you did not make.
- Uncover that your address has been changed for certain accounts without your authorization.
- Realize that you are no longer receiving your regular bills.
- File your personal income tax return electronically, and it is subsequently rejected.
- Receive a letter in the mail from the IRS.

If you determine that your information has been compromised, SC&H Group is here to help. We take data protection and privacy protection very seriously.

Our security and data integrity meets the highest industry standards. We have established protocols to safeguard sensitive files, and will work together to reduce the likelihood of you or a loved one being the next victim of a cyberattack.

To learn more about the latest scam developments and ways to reduce risk, contact SC&H Group [here](#).

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Visit | www.scandh.com Toll Free | 888-960-7569 Email | sch_group@scandh.com