



Rhode Island Department of Revenue

Division of Taxation

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ADVISORY FOR TAX PROFESSIONALS
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Tax professionals urged to beware of phishing scams

Cybercriminals seek to take advantage amid pandemic

PROVIDENCE — The Rhode Island Division of Taxation, the Internal Revenue Service, and other partners in the Security Summit urge tax professionals to be alert to new phishing scams that try to take advantage of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the federal “economic impact payments” (sometimes called “stimulus payments”, “COVID-19 payments”, or “recovery rebates”), and increased teleworking by practitioners.



Cybercriminals have stepped up efforts to steal client tax information from tax professionals. Crooks are targeting tax professionals as well as taxpayers. “The coronavirus has created new opportunities for cybercriminals to use email to try stealing sensitive information,” said IRS Commissioner Chuck Rettig. “The vast majority of data thefts start with a phishing email trick. Identity thieves pose as trusted sources – a client, your software provider, or even the IRS – to lure you into clicking on a link or attachment. Remember: Don’t take the bait. Learn to recognize and avoid phishing scams.”

Phishing emails generally have an urgent message. One such message may relate to the expiration of your account password. Such emails direct you to an official-looking link or attachment. The link may take you to a fake site made to appear like a trusted source and request your username and password. Or, the attachment may contain malware, which secretly downloads onto your computer, tracks keystrokes, and allows thieves to eventually steal all the tax professional’s passwords, said Rhode Island Tax Administrator Neena Savage.

This year, the IRS identified a highly sophisticated attack against tax firms in which thieves gained remote access either through phishing or malware and were able to enter the cloud storage accounts that held client files. In one case, thieves spent 18 months quietly downloading and accessing taxpayer information before they were discovered.

The Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) recently issued a warning to all organizations to educate employees, especially those teleworking, about increased activity related to phishing scams. For more information about this subject, use the following link: <https://go.usa.gov/xfzEY>.

The Security Summit consists of the IRS, the Rhode Island Division of Taxation, other states' tax agencies, and the tax community -- including tax preparation firms, software developers, tax professional organizations, and financial institutions. Partners in the Security Summit work together to combat identity theft and fight other scams to protect the nation's taxpayers.