



Rhode Island Department of Revenue

Division of Taxation

ADV 2019-32
TAX ADMINISTRATION

ADVISORY FOR TAX PROFESSIONALS
DECEMBER 2, 2019

Security Summit warns shoppers about threat of identity theft *Recommendations involve securing computers and mobile phones*

PROVIDENCE — The Rhode Island Division of Taxation, the Internal Revenue Service, and partners in the Security Summit opened this year's National Tax Security Awareness Week with a warning today for holiday shoppers to secure their computers and mobile phones to reduce the threat of identity theft.



During the holiday season, with large numbers of people shopping online, criminals take advantage by trying to steal identities and money – as well as sensitive tax and financial data that can be used to file fraudulent tax returns when the filing season opens in early 2020.

“The holidays may mean the shopping season to consumers, but it’s the hunting season for online thieves,” said IRS Commissioner Chuck Rettig. “Identity thieves are looking for your information to help them file fraudulent tax returns. A few simple steps can help protect you and your valuable information during the holiday season and at tax time.”

The IRS, state tax agencies, and the nation’s tax industry – working together as the Security Summit – mark today’s opening of the fourth annual National Tax Security Awareness Week with tips on basic safeguards that everyone should follow – especially those shopping online via computer or mobile phone.

“While you’re preparing for the holidays, thieves are preparing for the tax season, gathering up names, addresses, Social Security numbers, and other bits of data that they can use to try filing a fraudulent tax return” said Rhode Island Tax Administrator Neena Savage. “Everyone should take a few basic steps to help protect their identities, their financial accounts, their computers, and their mobile phones,” she said.

When shopping online, the IRS and Summit partners remind taxpayers to protect themselves with these tips:

- Shop at sites where the web address begins with “https” – the “s” is for secure communications over the computer network. This is an added layer of protection when

sharing credit card numbers for a purchase. Keep in mind that scam sites also can use “https,” so people should ensure they are shopping at a legitimate retailer’s website.

- Don’t shop on unsecured public wi-fi in places like a mall. Remember that thieves can eavesdrop.
- At home, secure home wi-fis with a password. As homes become more connected to the web, secured systems become more important, from wireless printers and wireless door locks to wireless thermometers. These can be access points for identity thieves.
- Don’t forget to use security software for computers and mobile phones – and keep it updated. Make sure purchased anti-virus software has a feature to stop malware, and there is a firewall that can prevent intrusions.
- Protect personal information; don’t hand it out to just anyone. Phishing scams – like imposter emails, calls and texts -- are the No. 1 way thieves steal personal data. Don’t open links or attachments on suspicious emails.
- Use strong and unique passwords for online accounts. Use a phrase or series of words that can be easily remembered.
- Use two-factor authentication whenever possible. Many email providers and social media sites offer this feature. It helps prevent thieves from easily hacking accounts.
- Back up files on computers and mobile phones. A cloud service or an external hard drive can be used to copy information from computers or phones – providing an important place to recover financial or tax data.



Keep in mind that thieves have become more adept at compromising mobile phones. Phone users also are more prone to open a scam email from their phone than from their computer.

About the Security Summit

The Security Summit consists of the IRS, state tax agencies, and the tax community -- including tax preparation firms, software developers, processors of payroll and tax financial products, 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. To learn more, click [here](#).

Taxpayers can check out security recommendations for their specific mobile phone by reviewing the Federal Communications Commission’s [Smartphone Security Checker](#). Since phones are used for shopping and even for doing taxes, remember to make sure phones and tablets are just as secure as computers.

The Rhode Island Division of Taxation office is at One Capitol Hill in Providence, R.I., diagonally across from the Smith Street entrance of the State House, and is open to the public 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. business days. To learn more, see the agency’s website: www.tax.ri.gov.