



Rhode Island Department of Revenue

Division of Taxation

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TAX ADMINISTRATION

ADVISORY FOR TAX PROFESSIONALS
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Security Summit warns about phishing epidemic

New campaign to launch next week on security awareness, emphasizing types of scams

PROVIDENCE, R.I. – The Rhode Island Division of Taxation, the Internal Revenue Service, and the tax industry warned tax professionals today to increase their computer security and to beware of their inbox – especially the email scams, dubbed “spear phishing”, that identify themselves as a friend, customer, or company.



The IRS, the Rhode Island Division of Taxation, tax agencies from other states, and the tax industry are working together as the Security Summit, implementing a series of initiatives to help guard against refund fraud and tax-related identity theft.

As part of its ongoing effort, the Security Summit next week will kick off its “Don’t Take the Bait” campaign. “We continue to see new and evolving threats involving data breaches, intrusions, and various takeovers that put people’s personal information at risk,” said IRS Commissioner John Koskinen.

“These efforts are increasingly targeting tax professionals and businesses with tax information. Too many still overlook basic security steps needed to protect their data. As part of this, we urge the tax professional community: Beware your inbox. Don’t take the bait from these phishing scams,” he said.

Infected links or attachments

Phishing scams use bait or lures to trick preparers into opening an infected link or attachment or disclosing usernames and passwords to critical accounts. Falling for the phishing bait means exposing taxpayer data to theft. Thieves also are interested in stealing preparers’ e-Services passwords, Electronic Filing Identification Numbers (EFINs), Centralized Authorization File (CAF) numbers, and Preparer Tax Identification Numbers (PTINs).

From January through May 2017, there were 177 tax professionals or firms who reported data thefts involving client information involving thousands of people. The IRS says it is currently receiving three to five data theft reports a week from tax practitioners. Not all data losses are due to phishing scams, but stopping this commonly used tactic by cybercriminals would do much to lessen the current losses.

Security Summit



“We’ve been warning tax professionals that they are increasingly the targets of national and international cybercriminal rings,” said Rhode Island Tax Administrator Neena Savage. “These syndicates are well-funded, knowledgeable and creative. It’s going to take all of us working together to combat these identity thieves. But doing nothing or making a minimal effort is no longer an option.”

The Security Summit will focus the “Don’t Take the Bait” campaign on security awareness, emphasizing the various types of phishing scams - a common and successful tactic used in data breaches. The 10-week series of news releases, which begins July 11, also will focus on what steps tax professionals can take to protect their clients and their business from these attacks. It is critical that tax professionals remember they have not just an obligation but a legal requirement under federal law to protect taxpayer information.

The “Don’t Take the Bait” campaign will also cover business identity theft, account takeovers, ransomware attacks, remote takeovers, business email compromises, and EFIN thefts. It also will offer tips recommended by the IRS, the FBI, and the National Institute for Standards and Technology (NIST), which sets cybersecurity frameworks followed by government agencies. To learn more, use the following links:

<https://www.irs.gov/individuals/protect-your-clients-protect-yourself>

<https://www.irs.gov/individuals/taxes-security-together>

CONTACT INFORMATION

The Division of Taxation is located on the first floor of the Powers Building, at One Capitol Hill in Providence, diagonally across from the Smith Street entrance of the State House. The Division is typically open to the public from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. business days. The main phone number is (401) 574-8829. (For questions about personal income tax, choose option # 3.) To see a list of phone numbers and email addresses to various sections within the agency, use the following link: <http://www.tax.ri.gov/contact/>. For refund status, see: <https://www.ri.gov/taxation/refund/>. (The Division of Taxation cannot directly respond to taxpayer inquiries via social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, because of State statutes protecting taxpayer confidentiality. For the same reason, individual taxpayer inquiries cannot be directly addressed when made through traditional media, such as TV stations and talk-show programs.)