



Rhode Island Department of Revenue

Division of Taxation

ADV 2019-33
TAX ADMINISTRATION

ADVISORY FOR TAX PROFESSIONALS
DECEMBER 3, 2019

Watch out for phishing scams this holiday season

Security Summit recommends ways to recognize and avoid such online scams

PROVIDENCE — The Rhode Island Division of Taxation, the Internal Revenue Service, and other partners in the Security Summit today warned taxpayers to watch out for phishing scams amid the deluge of holiday email messages coming from retailers and others.



More than 90% of all data thefts begin with an email phishing scam. “Identity thieves are looking for new and different ways to use phishing schemes to obtain sensitive information from people in hopes of filing fraudulent tax return,” said IRS Commissioner Chuck Rettig. “This is the season of giving, but be careful and don’t give your sensitive financial or tax information to an identity thief,” he said.

For the fourth year in a row, the IRS, state tax agencies, and the nation’s tax industry are highlighting the holiday period as a time to remember important safety tips everyone should take to protect their sensitive tax and financial data.

Year-round threat

Phishing scams remain a year-round threat to taxpayers. “The best defense against these scams is a well-informed user. Remember: Don’t take the bait,” said Rhode Island Tax Administrator Neena Savage.

Here’s what you need to know to protect yourself from phishing scams:

- The most common way thieves steal identities is simply by asking for it. Their favorite tactic is a phishing email. Phishing emails “bait” users into opening them. They pose as a trusted company like a bank, a favorite retailer, or even a tax professional.
- Learn to recognize and avoid these phishing emails. The scams tell an urgent story – they may say you have a “problem” with your account or your order, for example. The message then instructs the receiver to open an embedded link or download an attachment.
- Don’t take the bait. The email link may send users to a familiar website to log in, but the username and password goes to the thieves. Or, the scam suggests users open an attachment, which secretly downloads malicious software. Either method works for identity thieves.

These scam emails can show up in personal inboxes or even in a work inbox, endangering the entire organization. And mobile phone users are especially prone to responding more than those working on laptop or computer. If at home, just delete the email. If at work, follow the organization's guidance on handling the email.



Watch out for scam letters, phone calls

Emails aren't the only phishing tactic. Thieves may use letters or phone calls, especially when impersonating the IRS or the Rhode Island Division of Taxation. For example, recent letters claiming to be from the IRS are demanding payment of an overdue tax bill. The letter requests the check be paid to IRS, but it provides an incorrect telephone number.

Also keep the following points in mind:

- Neither the Rhode Island Division of Taxation nor the IRS calls taxpayers with angry demands of payment and threats of jail or a lawsuit.
- Neither the Rhode Island Division of Taxation nor the IRS makes threatening phone calls.
- Neither the Rhode Island Division of Taxation nor the IRS requests payment via gift cards or debit cards, such as iTunes.

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](#).

A new avenue for thieves lately is social media. Increasingly, thieves are embedding their links or malware in social media commentaries, tweets, or posts. So do not open links from social media unless you are certain of the source, the Security Summit cautioned.

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.