

Official-looking e-mails claiming to be from IRS are fraudulent

February 15 2009, By Elisabeth Nardi

Schemers claiming to be Uncle Sam are filling e-mail boxes in Contra Costa County, Calif., and across the country with messages asking for people's personal information.

Fraudulent e-mails claiming to be from the Internal Revenue Service, complete with an official-looking IRS masthead, ask the recipients to complete a W-4100B2 form and fax it to an international phone number. The form asks for personal information including name, birth date, address, Social Security number and bank account. The letter even asks for a copy of a person's driver's license or passport.

The e-mail states, "Our records indicate that you are a non-resident alien. As a result, you are exempted from United States of America tax reporting and withholdings."

The letter goes on to say that American citizens should fill out the form, as well, verifying citizenship.

Jesse Weller, a spokesman for the IRS, said this e-mail "phishing" is a scam, and that the IRS is aware of it. Such scams, unfortunately, go on all the time.

"These are really dangerous cyber-scams that are purportedly coming from the IRS and may look and sound like the IRS, but it's not," said Weller.

There is one way to always tell the difference between a scam and the real thing, "The IRS never sends e-mails out about personal tax accounts," he said.

In addition, the IRS never asks for detailed personal and financial information - credit card numbers, bank or other financial account numbers, PIN numbers, passwords or similar secret access information _ in an e-mail, he said. Recipients of questionable e-mails claiming to come from the IRS should not open any attachments or click on any links contained in those e-mails. Instead, they should forward the e-mails to phishing@irs.gov. The IRS has received almost 33,000 such e-mails forwarded to it, which has led to more than 1,000 different scams, according to Weller.

These scams are becoming more and more prevalent, especially around tax time, Weller said.

"Whenever the IRS is in the news, especially during tax season, these scams seem to flourish," he said.

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