

# Tax season bringing out the fraud artists

March 8 2010, By JORDAN ROBERTSON , AP Technology Writer

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(AP) -- How do you know that the sender of an e-mail that has landed in your inbox is trying to steal your money or your identity? The message comes right out and asks for it.

Tax season means computer criminals are going to be out in force, pumping out bogus e-mails that purport to be from the Internal Revenue Service. These messages ask you to supply personal information in all kinds of scams. Often the scam e-mails offer help speeding up the preparation of tax returns or securing a big refund.

The e-mails also might just be a cover for criminals to install [malicious software](#) on your computers, by tricking you into opening attachments or visiting poisoned Web sites.

Scam e-mails can be stunningly convincing, so you often can't tell just by looking at them whether they're real or fake. They can use authentic-looking IRS logos and even e-mail addresses: [Scammers](#) can make it appear as if they're writing from a legitimate government e-mail address, so you can't trust the "from" line in e-mails you receive.

So what should you do to protect yourself?

Don't supply your personal information, such as [Social Security numbers](#) or [credit card numbers](#), to anyone e-mailing you for it. The e-mails might state that they just need a few pieces of personal information to get started. The IRS doesn't discuss tax matters with people by e-mail.

Also, don't open attachments or follow links in unsolicited e-mails. When it comes to [computer security](#), if someone's offering you something online that you didn't ask for, chances are you probably don't want it.

**More information:** IRS page on computer scams: <http://bit.ly/XlJo>

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