



RAPPAHANNOCK COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE
GOVERNMENT IMPOSTER TELEPHONE
SCAM PREVENTION GUIDE

Presented by: Sheriff Connie C. Smith



Connie C. Smith
Sheriff

Rappahannock County Sheriff's Office

383 Porter Street
Washington, VA 22747
Office: 540-675-5300 Fax: 540-675-5301



John D. Arstino Jr.
Chief Deputy

Dear Citizens,

In light of the recent IRS telephone scams circulating in the area, this guide is being disseminated by RCSO in an effort to help protect its citizens from falling victim to scams as a result of Government Imposters. This guide consists of a compilation of information published by the Internal Revenue Service and the Federal Trade Commission. We are putting it in to one document so you don't have to look in different places to find what you need to be informed and vigilant in protecting yourself against these criminal acts. I hope to bring awareness to it and identify preventative measures that can be taken. Also, you will find how to report a scam, should you become a victim. As always, should anyone ever have questions, feel free to contact my office.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Connie C. Smith".

THE IRS SCAM:

The IRS scam is one of many types of what the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) describes as a “Government Imposter Scam.” Here is what the FTC has to say about Government Imposter scams:

Scammers sometimes pretend to be government officials to get you to send them money. They might promise lottery winnings if you pay “taxes” or other fees, or they might threaten you with arrest or a lawsuit if you don’t pay a supposed debt. Regardless of their tactics, their goal is the same: to get you to send them money.

Don’t do it. Federal government agencies and federal employees don’t ask people to send money for prizes or unpaid loans. Nor are they permitted to ask you to wire money or add money to a prepaid debit card to pay for anything.

HOW TO RECOGNIZE A GOVERNMENT IMPOSTER:

It could be hard to recognize an imposter through the lies they tell. They use a variety of tricks to get your attention, whether it’s distracting you with a story about money you won or creating a fear that you’ll be sued or arrested.

Here are two deceptions that they have used successfully to steal money from people:

You’ve “Won” a Lottery or Sweepstakes

Someone claiming to be a government official calls, telling you that you’ve won a federally supervised **lottery or sweepstakes**. They may say they’re from “the national consumer protection agency,” the non-existent National Sweepstakes Bureau, or even the very real Federal Trade Commission — and it looks like they’re calling from a legitimate number. They also might send e-mails, text messages or letters.

They might:

- tell you you’ll have to pay taxes or service charges before you can collect your winnings
- ask you to send money to an agent of “Lloyd’s of London” or some other well-known insurance company to “insure” delivery of your prize
- ask you to wire money right away, often to a foreign country

The truth is that no government agency or insurance company is involved, and there are no winnings. There never were. Scammers take the money you paid them and disappear.

You Owe a Fake Debt

You might get a call or an official-looking letter that has your correct name, address and Social Security number. Often, **fake debt collectors** say they're with a law firm or a government agency — for example, the FTC, the IRS or a sheriff's office. Then, they threaten to arrest you or take you to court if you don't pay on a debt you supposedly owe.

The truth: there's no legitimate reason for someone to ask you to wire money or load a rechargeable money card as a way to pay back a debt. If you're unsure whether the threat is legitimate, look up the official number for the government agency, office or employee (yes, even judges) and call to get the real story. Even if it is a real debt, **you have rights** under the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act.

Variations on these scams include people **claiming to be with the IRS** collecting back taxes, or scammers **posing as representatives of the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS)** who target immigration applicants and petitioners.

FIVE WAYS TO BEAT A GOVERNMENT IMPOSTER SCAM:

1. Don't wire money

Scammers often **pressure people into wiring money**, or strongly suggest that people put money on a prepaid debit card and send it to them. Why? It's like sending cash: once it's gone, you can't trace it or get it back. Never deposit a "winnings" check and wire money back, either. **The check is a fake**, no matter how good it looks, and you will owe the bank any money you withdraw. And don't share your account information, or send a check or money order using an overnight delivery or courier service. Con artists recommend these services so they can get your money before you realize you've been cheated.

2. Don't pay for a prize

If you enter and win a legitimate sweepstakes, you **don't have to pay** insurance, taxes, or shipping charges to collect your prize. If you have to pay, it's not a prize. And companies, including Lloyd's of London, don't insure delivery of sweepstakes winnings.

If you didn't enter a sweepstakes or lottery, then you can't have won. Remember that it's illegal to play a **foreign lottery** through the mail or over the phone.

3. Don't give the caller your financial or other personal information

Never give out or confirm financial or other sensitive information, including your bank account, credit card, or Social Security number, unless you know who you're dealing with. Scam artists, like **fake debt collectors**, can use your information to commit identity theft — charging your existing credit cards, opening new credit card, checking, or savings accounts, writing fraudulent

checks, or taking out loans in your name. If you get a call about a debt that may be legitimate — but you think the collector may not be — contact the company you owe money to about the calls.

4. Don't trust a name or number

Con artists use official-sounding names to make you trust them. It's illegal for any promoter to lie about an affiliation with — or an endorsement by — a government agency or any other well-known organization. No matter how convincing their story — or their stationery — they're lying. No legitimate government official will ask you to send money to collect a prize, and they won't call to collect your debt.

To make their call seem legitimate, scammers also use internet technology to disguise their area code. So even though it may look like they're calling from Washington, DC, they could be calling from anywhere in the world.

5. Put your number on the National Do Not Call Registry

Ok, so this won't stop scammers from calling. But it should make you skeptical of calls you get from out of the blue. Most legitimate sales people generally honor the Do Not Call list. Scammers ignore it. Putting your number on the list helps to "screen" your calls for legitimacy and reduce the number of legitimate telemarketing calls you get. Register your phone number at donotcall.gov.

IRS REPEATS WARNING ABOUT PHONE SCAMS:

As an additional resource, here is an article published by the IRS on www.IRS.gov on August 13, 2014:

R-2014-81, Aug. 13, 2014

WASHINGTON — The Internal Revenue Service and the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration continue to hear from taxpayers who have received unsolicited calls from individuals demanding payment while fraudulently claiming to be from the IRS.

Based on the 90,000 complaints that TIGTA has received through its telephone hotline, to date, TIGTA has identified approximately 1,100 victims who have lost an estimated \$5 million from these scams.

"There are clear warning signs about these scams, which continue at high levels throughout the nation," said IRS Commissioner John Koskinen. "Taxpayers should remember their first contact with the IRS will not be a call from out of the blue, but through official correspondence sent through the mail.

A big red flag for these scams are angry, threatening calls from people who say they are from the IRS and urging immediate payment. This is not how we operate. People should hang up immediately and contact TIGTA or the IRS.”

Additionally, it is important for taxpayers to know that the IRS:

- Never asks for credit card, debit card or prepaid card information over the telephone.
- Never insists that taxpayers use a specific payment method to pay tax obligations
- Never requests immediate payment over the telephone and will not take enforcement action immediately following a phone conversation. Taxpayers usually receive prior notification of IRS enforcement action involving IRS tax liens or levies.

Potential phone scam victims may be told that they owe money that must be paid immediately to the IRS or they are entitled to big refunds. When unsuccessful the first time, sometimes phone scammers call back trying a new strategy.

Other characteristics of these scams include:

- Scammers use fake names and IRS badge numbers. They generally use common names and surnames to identify themselves.
- Scammers may be able to recite the last four digits of a victim’s Social Security number.
- Scammers spoof the IRS toll-free number on caller ID to make it appear that it’s the IRS calling.
- Scammers sometimes send bogus IRS emails to some victims to support their bogus calls.
- Victims hear background noise of other calls being conducted to mimic a call site.
- After threatening victims with jail time or driver’s license revocation, scammers hang up and others soon call back pretending to be from the local police or DMV, and the caller ID supports their claim.

If you get a phone call from someone claiming to be from the IRS, here’s what you should do:

- If you know you owe taxes or you think you might owe taxes, call the IRS at 1.800.829.1040. The IRS employees at that line can help you with a payment issue, if there really is such an issue.
- If you know you don’t owe taxes or have no reason to think that you owe any taxes (for example, you’ve never received a bill or the caller made some bogus threats as described above), then call and report the incident to TIGTA at 1.800.366.4484.
- If you’ve been targeted by this scam, you should also contact the Federal Trade Commission and use their “FTC Complaint Assistant” at [FTC.gov](https://www.ftc.gov). Please add "IRS Telephone Scam" to the comments of your complaint.

Taxpayers should be aware that there are other unrelated scams (such as a lottery sweepstakes) and solicitations (such as debt relief) that fraudulently claim to be from the IRS.

The IRS encourages taxpayers to be vigilant against phone and email scams that use the IRS as a lure. The IRS does not initiate contact with taxpayers by email to request personal or financial information. This includes any type of electronic communication, such as text messages and social media channels.

The IRS also does not ask for PINs, passwords or similar confidential access information for credit card, bank or other financial accounts. Recipients should not open any attachments or click on any links contained in the message. Instead, forward the email to phishing@irs.gov.

For more information or to report a scam, go to www.irs.gov and type "scam" in the search box.

More information on how to report phishing scams involving the IRS is available on the genuine IRS website, IRS.gov.