



District Attorney's Office - 18th Judicial District

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Consumer Advisory

File Early to Avoid a Stolen Tax Refund

All that is needed for a criminal to steal a tax refund is a name, birthdate and Social Security number. To reduce the risk of having your personal information used by a thief to steal your refund, file as soon as possible. Protecting personal information goes a long way toward preventing tax refund theft, especially information that is transmitted or stored electronically. However, in this era of data breaches, a crime over which consumers have little or no control, it's difficult to know if your personal data is ever truly protected. Unsuspecting victims discover the theft at the time they submit their tax return. If a crook has already filed using a victim's SSN, the return will be rejected. Victims who report the theft will ultimately receive their refund, but it can take months to process and the criminals may never be found.

On average, the turn-around time on the issuance of a tax refund is twenty-one days from the date the refund is received by the IRS. This is also the operative period for identity thieves to submit fabricated electronic returns, including specific instructions on where and how to send their payment. In order to expedite the process of issuing tax refunds, the IRS relies solely on the information presented on the tax return. The verification process of documents that are submitted to the IRS happens after W-2's and other tax forms are submitted by employers, usually by March. By then, most refunds have already been issued.

For the 2016 tax filing period, the IRS has imposed additional protections to control the high rate of tax refund theft. One such measure is the issuance of individualized IP-PIN numbers for victims of identity theft. Doing so will flag returns that require additional examination before a refund will be sent. In order to qualify, victims need to fill out the Identify Theft Affidavit – **Form 14039** which can be found on the IRS website at www.irs.gov/

Signs of tax fraud:

- You submit your electronic tax return and it is rejected
- You are expecting a tax refund, but never receive it
- You discover that one or more tax refunds have been filed under your SSN
- You receive an email that appears to be from the IRS or other legitimate-sounding agency requesting personal information such as your SSN, DOB, etc. for verification reasons. This is likely an email phishing scam.

If you discover you have been a victim of a stolen tax refund, contact the IRS Identity Theft Protection Specialized Unit at **1-800-998-4490**.

18th Judicial Consumer Protection Line: 720-874-8547