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Stay alert for scams and fraud

The Australian Taxation Office (ATO) is committed to educating taxpayers on how to protect themselves against tax scams and identity theft. It says that up to the end of last financial year, \$2.7 million was handed over to fraudsters, with about 2,500 individuals providing some sort of personal information to scammers, including tax file numbers.

Over the 2017 calendar year, the ATO's Be aware of what you share video was viewed more than 800,000 times. (You can still find the video via a web search.) The ATO also maintains multiple web pages with information for businesses and individuals about scams, covering topics such as identity security and protecting your information. The most popular page is "Verify or report a scam" (which, again, a web search will find for you).

The ATO's social media channels also warn followers about current scams in the community, and advise people how to protect themselves and what to do if they suspect they've been affected.

But even with all these warnings and links to information, taxpayers are still being hit by scammers. The latest advice from the ATO reveals that fraudsters are constantly coming up with new tricks to try to hoodwink Australian taxpayers, making some scams harder to spot than others.

For example, some scammers source genuine ATO phone numbers from its website and project these numbers in their caller ID in an attempt to legitimise their call – a form of impersonation known as "spoofing". While the ATO does make thousands of calls per week to the community, its outbound calls do not project numbers on caller ID. If one appears, this is the first red flag to alert you that the call could be a scam.

You should also be wary of emails and SMS messages that claim to be from the ATO, even if they seem legitimate. If you're ever unsure about whether a call, text message or email is genuine, you can call the ATO on 1800 008 540. If the communication you have received is legitimate, the ATO will be able to connect you with the right department.

Additionally, major retailers and financial institutions continue to integrate customer warning notices into their businesses to try to combat some of the most common scam payment methods, including iTunes gift vouchers and direct transfer into fake "ATO" bank accounts.

Top tips to avoid tax traps

- Be aware of what you share

You should only share your personal information with people you trust and organisations with a legitimate need for it.

- Stay secure

Keep your mobile devices and computers secure by changing your passwords regularly, keep your anti-virus, malware and spyware protection software up-to-date and don't click on suspicious links.

- Don't reply

Don't reply to any SMS or email with your personal or financial information.

- Recognise a scam

If someone asks you for your bank account or personal details, or demands money, refunds or free gifts, be cautious. Also avoid requests in emails or SMSs requesting you to click on a link to log on to government or banking digital services.

- Report scams

If you think you or someone you know might have been contacted by a scammer, or have fallen victim to a tax-related scam, contact the ATO on 1800 008 540.

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