Just about the time we think we can’t be fooled, some new scam comes along that dupes many unsuspecting folks. We’ve learned not to pay attention to any sweepstake prizes, lost bank accounts from foreign banks or other get rich schemes.

However, con artists are becoming increasingly devious and crafty as they hide their efforts to con people out of money and personal information. They create a website and send out emails that imitate real businesses, organizations and even government offices. They can fool even the shrewdest consumer.

In a current scam, con artists mimic the IRS websites and emails. Claiming the recipient is eligible for a tax refund from the IRS, they send emails to unsuspecting taxpayers with a link that requests personal information such as social security numbers and credit card information. The IRS has reported a recent rise in complaints about such scams.

The Better Business Bureau in Alaska is currently reporting that people are receiving automated phone calls purporting to be from the IRS, saying there is something wrong with their tax return. With today’s technology, scammers can even make the caller ID appear to be from IRS.

There is nothing that scares us more than the idea of running afoul with the IRS; it’s not that any of us would purposely cheat on our taxes, but the tax code is complicated. Many of us are concerned about having a deduction disallowed and owing more money on our return. That paranoia plays right into the con man’s plans.

Here is the way the Better Business Bureau says you should handle a call if you should get one. Remember, the IRS will not initiate contact about a tax return processing problem over the phone or by email. The IRS will always send a written notification of any tax due by the U.S. mail. It will never ask for credit card, debit card or prepaid card information over the telephone or by email. And the IRS certainly does not threaten to throw you in jail if you don’t turn over your information immediately, as several people have reported.
If you get a phone call from someone claiming to be from the IRS, here’s what you should do:

- If you owe taxes or you think you might owe taxes, call the IRS at 800-820-1040. The IRS employees at that line can help you with a payment issue, if there really is such an issue. If you initiate the call, you know you will be talking with the “real” IRS.

- If you don’t owe taxes or have no reason to think that you owe any taxes, then call and report the incident to the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration at 800-366-4484.

- If you’ve been targeted by this scam, you should also contact the Federal Trade Commission and use its “FTC Complaint Assistant” at FTC.gov., and please include “IRS telephone scam” in your comments.

Don’t be taken in by scammers as they hone their abilities to separate you from your money.

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