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identification information from people who thought they were applying for jobs and used it to file phony tax returns.

Oct. 09, 2013

Oct. 09— A Florida man pleaded guilty in federal court Tuesday in a scam that obtained identification information from people who thought they were applying for jobs and used it to file phony tax returns.

As part of the complicated scheme, tax refunds were sought on prepaid debit cards, some of which were mailed to Richmond-area mailboxes. Some of the fraudulent returns were filed via computer from a hotel in Richmond.

Under the terms of a plea agreement, Ramoth Jean, 33, of Miami, pleaded guilty to charges of conspiracy to commit mail and wire fraud and aggravated identity theft before U.S. District Judge Henry E. Hudson in Richmond.

Jean faces up to 20 years for the conspiracy conviction and a minimum term of two additional years for the identity theft when sentenced Jan. 9.

As of May, authorities alleged the personal information — names, Social Security numbers and birth dates — was used to file at least 133 false tax returns seeking more than \$700,000 in refunds from the IRS.

According to court documents, some of the false returns successfully obtained refunds, while others did not. More recent figures were not available, nor were figures on how many refunds were actually made as a result of the scam.

But a statement of facts signed by Jean for purposes of calculating his sentence range says there were 747 “reasonably foreseeable” victims with a foreseeable loss — at an average refund of \$3,000 — of \$2.2 million.

Authorities said the scheme came to light last year after someone used another

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He was arrested and the cardboard box seized. However, he was released because the officer could not prove the card was stolen.

It was later determined the card was issued via TurboTax in connection with a fraudulently filed tax return but that it was not funded with a refund because no refund was issued.

Warrants were obtained to search the box found with Jean and the storage unit. Investigators found tax documents and correspondence mailed from the IRS and Turbo- Tax to Richmond-area addresses and elsewhere.

Other items discovered included two laptop computers, a USB flash drive, CDs, prepaid debit cards and index cards with the names of 747 people often accompanied by personal information and printouts of online job applications.

Authorities said it appeared some of the debit cards were used to make charges to CareerBuilder.com and Snagajob.com to pay for help-wanted advertisements used to snare the personal identity information from unwitting job applicants.

Jean's indictment last month said the prepaid debit cards were retrieved from mailboxes of the designated addresses — which did not belong to the purported taxpayers — and then used to withdraw money from ATMs.

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