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Nov. 11, 2013

A sophisticated phone scam is sweeping the country, using fear of the Internal Revenue Service to target recent immigrants and others, IRS officials warn.

“Victims are told they owe money to the IRS and it must be paid promptly through a pre-loaded debit card or wire transfer,” they said. “If the victim refuses to cooperate, they are then threatened with arrest, deportation or suspension of a business or driver's license.”

Often, the caller becomes hostile and insulting, they said.

This scam has hit taxpayers in nearly every state, and IRS officials hope to warn taxpayers so they can protect themselves.

“Rest assured, we do not and will not ask for credit card numbers over the phone, nor request a pre-paid debit card or wire transfer,” IRS Acting Commissioner Danny Werfel said in a statement. “If someone unexpectedly calls claiming to be from the IRS and threatens police arrest, deportation or license revocation if you don't pay immediately, that is a sign that it really isn't the IRS calling.”

The IRS encourages taxpayers to be vigilant against phone and email scams that use the agency as a lure. The IRS doesn't initiate contact with taxpayers by email, text message or other social media to request personal or financial information. The IRS also doesn't ask for PINs, passwords or other 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 e-mail to [phishing@irs.gov](mailto:phishing@irs.gov).

The first contact with taxpayers on a tax issue is usually by regular mail, Werfel said.

The current scam also includes:

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–Victims hearing background noise mimicking a call center.

–Hanging up after threatening jail time or drivers license revocation, followed soon after by a call pretending to be from the local police or DMV, with caller ID supporting their claim.

Source: Internal Revenue Service

Other unrelated scams like a lottery sweepstakes and solicitations like debt relief also fraudulently claim to be from the IRS. If you get a phone call from someone claiming to be from the IRS, you should:

–Call the IRS at 800-829-1040 if you know or think you owe taxes. The IRS employees at that line can help with a payment issues if such an issue exists.

–Call 800-366-4484 to report the incident to the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration if you know you don't owe taxes or have no reason to think you do because you've gotten to bill or the caller made some bogus threats as described above.

–Also contact the Federal Trade Commission and use their FTC Complaint Assistant at [FTC.gov](https://www.ftc.gov), and add “IRS Telephone Scam” to the comments.

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