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individuals make unsolicited calls to taxpayers fraudulently claiming to be IRS officials and demanding that they send them cash via prepaid debit cards, he said.

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The feds are on it, but be vigilant.

The Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA), which oversees the IRS, says that even though it has made progress on investigating phone fraud scammers misrepresenting themselves as Internal Revenue Service (IRS) employees, taxpayers should continue to beware of these fraudulent phone calls.

“We have made progress in our investigation of this scam, resulting in the successful prosecution of some individuals associated with it over the past year,” said J. Russell George, Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration. “This summer, a ringleader was sentenced to more than 14 years in federal prison,” he said.

“However, this is still a matter of high investigative priority, and we will not rest

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have ever seen. The callers are aggressive, they are relentless and they are ruthless,” he said. “Once they have your attention, they will say anything to con you out of your hard-earned cash,” George added.

TIGTA has received reports of roughly 736,000 contacts since October 2013 and has become aware of approximately 4,550 victims who have collectively paid over \$23 million as a result of the scam, in which criminals make unsolicited calls to taxpayers fraudulently claiming to be IRS officials and demanding that they send them cash via prepaid debit cards.

“The increasing number of people receiving these unsolicited calls from individuals who fraudulently claim to represent the IRS is alarming,” George said. “At all times, and even after the tax filing season, we want to make sure that innocent taxpayers are alerted to this scam so they are not harmed by these criminals,” he said, adding, “Do not become a victim.”

“This is a crime of opportunity, so the best thing you can do to protect yourself is to take away the opportunity,” the Inspector General added. “If someone unexpectedly calls claiming to be from the IRS and uses threatening language if you do not pay immediately, that is a sign that it is not the IRS calling, and your cue to hang up,” George said. “Again, do not engage with these callers. If they call you, hang up the telephone.”

Inspector General George noted that the scam has hit taxpayers in every State in the country. Callers claiming to be from the IRS tell intended victims they owe taxes and must pay using a pre-paid debit card or wire transfer. The scammers threaten those who refuse to pay with being charged for a criminal violation, immediate arrest, deportation or loss of a business or driver's license.

TIGTA is proactively taking steps to raise consumer awareness to this harmful scam,

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- Utilize an automated robocall machine.
- Use common names and fake IRS badge numbers.
- May know the last four digits of the victim's Social Security Number.
- Make caller ID information appear as if the IRS is calling.
- Send bogus IRS e-mails to support their scam.
- Call a second or third time claiming to be the police or department of motor vehicles, and the caller ID again supports their claim.

If you get a call from someone claiming to be with the IRS asking for a payment, here's what to do: If you owe Federal taxes, or think you might owe taxes, hang up and call the IRS at 800-829-1040. IRS workers can help you with your payment questions.

- If you do not owe taxes, fill out the "IRS Impersonation scam" form on TIGTA's website, www.treasury.gov/tigta, or call TIGTA at 800-366-4484.
- You can also file a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission at www.FTC.gov. Add "IRS Telephone Scam" to the comments in your complaint.

TIGTA encourages taxpayers to be alert for phone and e-mail scams that use the IRS name. The IRS will never request personal or financial information by e-mail, text, or any social media. You should forward scam e-mails to phishing@irs.gov. Do not open any attachments or click on any links in those e-mails.

Taxpayers should be aware that there are other unrelated scams (such as a lottery sweepstakes winner) and solicitations (such as debt relief) that fraudulently claim to be from the IRS.

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