

You worked hard for your money - don't let a stranger steal it from you.

IRS ENFORCEMENT SCAM

Did you receive a telephone message or telephone call from the IRS? They said you owe back taxes and unless you settle the debt immediately, you will be arrested for tax fraud.

STOP! These calls are a scam.

Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem warns North Dakotans that scam artists are using the name of a government agency in the hope of convincing people that the call is legitimate. Residents across the state report having received threatening phone messages supposedly from the IRS. The message claims that there is a problem with a tax return and failure to return the call will lead to the individual's arrest.

"No one wants to get into trouble with the IRS, and that's what the scam artists are counting on. They hope that anyone receiving such a message will be intimidated into calling back immediately, and that's where the scam begins," said Stenehjem.

Although the call back number appears to be in the United States, the scam artists use readily available technology to relay the calls to their true location, outside the country.

The scam artist tells the victim to go to a local retailer and purchase pre-paid instant cash cards. The victim is then instructed to provide the "agent" with the numbers from the back of the prepaid card. As soon as the scam artist has those numbers, he can go online and empty the cash off the card before the victim even hangs up the phone. In a recent variation, the scam artist instructs the victim to purchase a certified cashiers check, deposit it into a specified bank account and fax or e-mail the deposit receipt to the scam artist. With that receipt, the scam artist gains access to the funds and can immediately clean out the account.

Once the scam artist has the money, it is gone - there is no way to recover it.

Stenehjem reminded North Dakotans that the real IRS does not notify you of a potential problem by leaving you a threatening phone message. He provided the following tips:

- If you receive a message on your phone, simply delete it without response. If you pick up the call, don't respond to the scam artist – just hang up.
- Never confirm or provide personal information in response to these scam calls.

Stenehjem said that each time this scam surfaces and warnings are issued, the scam artists find another twist to make the scam just a little different, in the hope they can continue to find victims.

"Hang up on scam artists," said Stenehjem. "If they ask you to buy a Green Dot or other type of instant cash card, or to wire money, **then it's a scam.** If you are told you have to make a payment immediately in order to avoid the threat of arrest, **then it's a scam.** It's as simple as that. **It doesn't matter what reason they give you, it is always a scam, every single time,**" he continued.

Report the calls

The Internal Revenue Service urges anyone who receives a fake IRS phone call or message to report it directly to the United States Treasury inspector general:

- Phone: **1-800-366-4484** (toll free); OR
- Email: **phishing@irs.gov.**