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ATTORNEY GENERAL WARNS CITIZENS ABOUT PHONY IRS EMAILS

BISMARCK – E-mails purportedly from the IRS are nothing more than a scam designed to trick consumers into revealing bank account and personal information so the scam artist can steal from them, warns Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem, whose office has received reports from several citizens about the emails.

The e-mails pop up every year during tax season and use a copycat IRS logo to fool people into thinking they are legitimate. Many versions claim the recipient is owed a large tax refund while others claim there is a problem with the tax return and the recipient should “verify” personal information. Some even threaten criminal penalties for not providing the information. One thing all the e-mails have in common is a link to a form that collects the information and puts it right into the hands of the thief.

“Consumers may see many more of these scam e-mails over the next few months, as thieves try to take advantage of people waiting for the tax rebates just approved by Congress,” said Stenehjem. “Don’t give thieves the chance to steal from you. Delete these e-mails immediately.”

Parrell Grossman, director of the Consumer Protection Division, reminded taxpayers that the IRS never initiates e-mails. He offered the following tips:

- Never respond to an e-mail asking you to confirm or verify account information, even if it looks official. Instead, open a new browser and go to the company’s website or call the customer service number listed on its business letterhead.
- Never give out bank account or credit card numbers or other personal information over the telephone unless you initiated the call and you know the company is reliable.
- Tax information and tax forms are available from the IRS website at www.irs.gov or by calling the IRS toll free at 1-800-829-1040. Taxpayers can check the status of their refund online at: <https://sa1.www4.irs.gov/irfof/lang/en/irfofgetstatus.jsp>.

The IRS cautions that some people have received telephone calls from scam artists claiming to be IRS agents. The scammer claims that the taxpayer must provide bank account information in order to receive their tax refund or the just-approved tax rebate. In fact, the IRS does not ever call taxpayers to collect direct deposit or bank account information. For more information about these and other tax scams, see: <http://www.irs.gov/newsroom/article/0,,id=178061,00.html>.

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