Tax Time Phishing Scam

It's a great time of year to remind you about all of the scammers targeting folks this time of year. Crooks will come at you with phone calls, emails, and messages. Many of them are designed to provoke a panic response so you pay them or give personal information before you have time to really think about it.

One new twist this year is a phone call with a spoofed number that appears to be from the IRS TAC office. (A spoofed number is when crooks use a fake number on the caller ID to make it look like the call is coming from a nearby location or a legitimate business or agency).

The crooks demand payment for back taxes. If the consumer presses for proof, they tell them to look up the number of the local IRS office, which is the number the crooks make appear on your caller ID display. Consumers are threatened with fines or visits by the police.

Another phone scam tells victims they are from the TAS (Taxpayer Advocate Service) and the person is entitled to a large refund. Users have to call back and provide personal information to get the money. They will also sometimes send emails to support these calls.
They've also taken to using video relay services to scam hard-of-hearing targets.

There's an email scam where fraudsters claim to be sending you a tax transcript. Clicking on the link can download malicious software onto your devices. The scam email carries an attachment labeled “Tax Account Transcript” or something similar, and the subject line uses some variation of the phrase “tax transcript.”

Also look out for emails that claim there is a problem with your recently filed tax return or with your refund. Scammers use this trick to get you to click on malicious links. If you think you might actually have an issue, bypass any links in an email and look up the phone number for your preparer or the IRS separately and give them a call. If the email claims to be from someone like TurboTax, go find the contact information for the company on your own. Don't click the links.

And don't allow phone calls to scare you.

The IRS states very clearly on their website that under no circumstances do they:

- Call to demand immediate payment using a specific payment method such as a prepaid debit card, gift card or wire transfer. Generally, the IRS will first mail a bill to any taxpayer who owes taxes.
- Threaten to immediately bring in local police or other law-enforcement groups to have the taxpayer arrested for not paying.
- Demand that taxes be paid without giving taxpayers the opportunity to question or appeal the amount owed.
- Ask for credit or debit card numbers over the phone.
- Call about an unexpected refund.