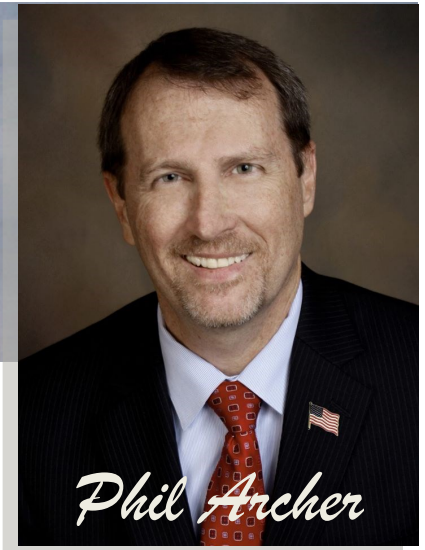




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# The Monthly Brief

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## IRS DIRTY DOZEN

Each year the IRS lists the most common “[Dirty Dozen](#)” scams tax payers may encounter at any time of year. Here are just some they have reported on:

#1 [Communication Scams](#). Suspicious communications in all its forms designed to either trick, surprise or scare someone into responding before thinking “is this a scam?” Be on the lookout for bogus calls, texts, emails and posts online to gain trust or steal your financial or personal info.

#2 [Pandemic Scams](#). Economic Impact and refund ploys, Unemployment fraud, Fake Job Offers, and Tax Identity Fraud.

#3 [Identity Theft](#), using stolen social security numbers. With data taken in recent hacks, this is a growing problem.

#4 [Imposter tax preparer emails and calls](#) Be careful selecting a tax professional. Most provide honest, high-quality service, but a minority of dishonest preparers operate each filing season perpetrating refund fraud, identity theft and other scams that hurt innocent taxpayers.

#5 [Fake Charities soliciting donations](#) with claims of tax deductions but not associated with legitimate established charities.

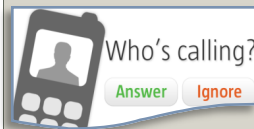
#6 [Offers to boost your tax refund](#) Return preparers promising larger refunds than competitors or providing refunds substantially larger than taxpayers have routinely seen could be a warning sign

Get more info about these and other scams directly from the [IRS website](#). Report tax scam incidents by visiting the [Treasury Inspector General's Office](#) online.

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## Caller ID Spoofing



Caller ID spoofing is when a caller deliberately falsifies the information shown on your caller ID display, so you'll answer the phone. Often used by scammers to impersonate a company or government, spoofing makes it easier for crooks to convince victims their con is legitimate. “[Neighbor Spoofing](#)” is used to display a phone number similar to your own, to increase chances you'll answer the call. This is a favorite ploy of vacation and telemarketing scams.

#1 tip to avoid Spoofing Scams? Never answer calls from unknown numbers, **PERIOD**. Wait for a voicemail message, then add legitimate caller numbers to your contacts. No message? Block that number!

- Never respond by pressing a button to stop future calls or to “Opt Out”. It's a trick to identify good working numbers and you'll get even more calls.
- Hang up and verify. Find the real contact number and call to check if the company or agency is really trying to reach you. Government will usually mail a letter first.
- Never give any unsolicited caller your personal info - hang up if you're pressured.

You can get more info on identifying and blocking Spoofing calls by visiting the [FCC's website](#) and the [Better Business Bureau website](#).

## TROUBLE WITH GIFT CARDS

According to the [National Retail Federation](#), consumers will purchase between three and four gift cards, for an average spend of \$165 per consumer or 28.6 billion dollars. It's no wonder they are a part of so [many consumer scams](#). The [FTC reports](#) that gift cards are the #1 form of payment demanded by imposter scammers posing as the IRS, police, courts, relatives in trouble, utility companies and more. Why? Because they are easily obtained by victims and virtually untraceable.



Buying gift cards also presents problems. Physical cards bought off a rack are targeted by criminals who copy the card codes and scratch off the strip to steal the PIN. Some place a duplicate bar code over the card's original one. When the cashier scans the card to activate it, the funds are transferred to the crooks account, not that card. Always check the packaging of any gift card for physical tampering. [Consumer Reports says a better option is to buy all gift cards online](#). Other tips #1 Use cards quickly. #2 Protect Cards by recording numbers and registering them. #3 Change the PIN if possible #4 Don't buy gift cards on auction sites or Craigslist, these are loaded with scammers both buying and selling. Check out these [FTC tips for reporting scams](#), including contact info for Amazon, Google, iTunes and more.

Here's a [helpful video from WKGO News 7](#) with more tips and info on buying, giving and using gift cards.

\*WKGO, Consumer Reports, FTC, NRF