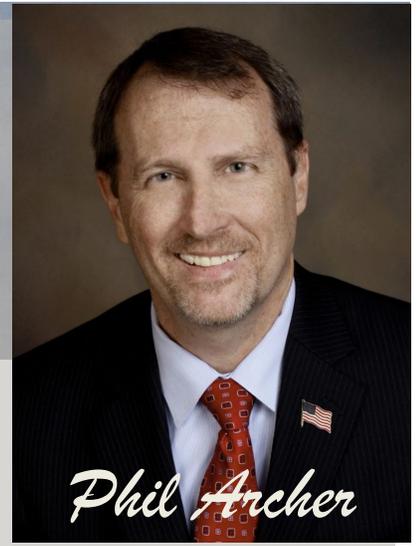




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The Monthly Brief

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IRS TAX SCAMS

January marks when most Americans begin preparing to meet their upcoming tax obligations. The IRS reports it's also when crooks launch a wave of scam tactics designed to steal your identity and money.

Here are the IRS top tax scams this year:

#1 [Phone Scams](#). Your phone rings and caller ID says it's the IRS. The caller says you have a refund owed to you but they need personal info to process the payment. Or they demand immediate payment for overdue taxes using your credit card or bank info. If this happens, hang up and call the IRS at 1-800-829-1040. They'll tell you if there is a problem or if this is a scam.

#2 [Phishing Scams](#). An email, seemingly from the IRS, reports you're due a refund, have past due taxes, or your credit card has been exposed. To fix the problem a link is provided directing you to phony website that asks for personal info to verify identity, or payment details like credit card and bank account numbers. The real IRS never sends links. Again, call them at 1-800-829-1040.

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

#4 [Imposter tax preparer emails and calls](#)

#5 [Fake Charities soliciting donations](#)

#6 [Offers to boost your tax refund](#)

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 disguising their identity, 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. A favorite ploy of vacation and telemarketing scams.

#1 tip to avoid Spoofing Scams? Never answer calls from unknown numbers, **PERIOD**. Wait for a message then put good #'s in your contacts. No message? Block that number!

- Never respond by pressing a button to stop future calls. 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

Gift card holiday sales are expected to approach \$30 billion this year and according to the National Retail Federation, nearly 6 in 10 consumers will shop with gift cards this year. 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 get a reloadable, prepaid card from a credit card company like Visa or American Express, who limit your liability to \$50 and sometimes zero if you report the theft within two days. 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.

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, Giftcards