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The Monthly Brief

Volume 7 Issue 4

April 2019

BAD CHECK PRIZE SCAM

Most of us have heard about the Lottery Prize scam, but now there's a new twist.

In the past you might receive an email or call from a contest organizer saying you've won a prize. To claim the prize you must pay the taxes, shipping costs, or other fees, usually by wire transfer or prepaid debit card.

Now the crooks are using a technique that was previously known as the [Bad Check Buyer scam](#). Here's how it works:

You receive a letter or an email informing you you've won a jackpot, often from a foreign lottery and includes a seal or other insignia to make it look authentic. There is even a check to cover the taxes on the winnings. You are instructed to deposit the check into your bank account and wire or use a prepaid debit card to send the "taxes" to a third party. The [check is a fake](#) and you are out the money. Tips to avoid this scam:

Don't pay upfront fees to claim a prize (taxes, shipping, or processing) ever! It's a sure sign of a scam.

You've got to play to win. A notification that you have won a prize in a contest you do not remember entering should be a red flag.

Be suspicious of text, email, and bulk letter notifications. Real sweepstakes will personally contact you, they won't send an advance check in the mail, and you won't be told to respond or act within 24 hours to collect your prize. [10 ways to avoid scams!](#)

*BBB, FTC, ConsumerFed.org

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Facebook Charity Scams

We've told you about phony government grant scams on Facebook. In a new twist the Better Business Bureau is reporting that this is also being done to promote fake charities.

Here's how it works: You are scrolling through Facebook when a message pops up in Facebook Messenger. It's your friend, family member, or neighbor. You can tell by their photo. The "friend" claims to be raising money for a charity and asks you to make a donation. You'd normally be suspicious of an unknown charity. But the message is coming from someone you know and trust. Or is it?

Scammers are hijacking a person's Facebook profile image and sending these messages to all their friends. The charity doesn't exist, and if you pay, your money is gone.

Tips to Avoid This Scam: Check the profile: Click through messenger to the Facebook profile. You'll most likely find it's a fake. **Press for details:** Ask questions to confirm you are actually talking to someone you know. **Hide Your Friends List:** If scammers can't see your friends list, your less likely to be targeted. **Report it to Facebook [here](#).** **Do some research:** [Look up the charity's name](#) and if you can't find a website, it's most likely a fake. To learn about online charity fundraising, check out how legitimate charities are evaluated on [Give.org](#) and learn more about safe at [Giving Guidance & Tips](#).

*BBB.org

THE "DIRTY DOZEN"

The Internal Revenue Service wrapped up issuing its annual "[Dirty Dozen](#)" list of tax scams. The IRS reminds taxpayers to remain vigilant to these often aggressive and evolving schemes throughout the year.



This year's "Dirty Dozen" list highlights a wide variety of schemes that taxpayers may encounter at any time, although many may peak during tax-filing season. The schemes run the gamut from simple refund inflation scams to complex tax shelter deals. A common theme throughout all: Scams put taxpayers at risk.

The IRS highlighted the "Dirty Dozen" scam list in separate news releases over 12 weekdays (see below links). Taxpayers are encouraged to review the list in a special section on IRS.gov and be on the lookout for these ruses throughout the year.

Taxpayers should remember that they are legally responsible for what is on their tax return even if it is prepared by someone else. Consumers can help protect themselves by choosing a reputable tax preparer. For more, see the [Choosing a Tax Professional](#) page.

On the list this year, [Phishing](#); [Phone Scams](#); [ID Theft](#); [Return Preparer Fraud](#); [Inflated Refund Claims](#); [Falsifying Income to Claim Credits](#); [False or Padded Deductions](#); [Fake Charities](#); [Business Deduction Padding](#); [Off Shore Tax Avoidance](#); [Tax "Protester" Scams](#); and [Abusive Tax Shelters](#). Click links to visit IRS.gov articles

*IRS.gov