

IRS Refund Scam

This type of scam happens every year around tax time. I received the below email yesterday:

The screenshot shows an AOL webmail interface. The browser title is "AOL Read - Microsoft Internet Explorer provided by Holden Police Department". The address bar shows "http://webmail.aol.com/34032/aol/en-us/Mail/DisplayMessage.aspx". The email header includes "Refund ID: BZENXVYSOT" and "IRS.gov to you (bcc) - yesterday". The body of the email contains the following text:

After the last annual fiscal activity we have determined that you are eligible to receive a tax refund. Please submit the tax refund request and allow us 6-9 days in order to process it.

To access the form for our tax refund calculator, please copy/paste in your browser the link below:

<http://www.suprasphere.com/refundtax/index.php>

© Copyright 2008, Internal Revenue Service U.S.A.

ZMNBUDWDYFMWXWYFVHUFDFJCDOFNZUUHKQXDJ

The email looks good. On the header it says it's from the IRS. If you opened the header and looked up the originating IP address it does not belong to the federal government.

If you opened the link, it would bring you to the following site:

The screenshot shows the Internal Revenue Service website. The header includes the IRS logo and "United States Department of the Treasury". The navigation menu includes "INDIVIDUALS", "BUSINESSES", "CHARITIES & NON-PROFITS", "GOVERNMENT ENTITIES", "TAX PROFESSIONALS", "RETIREMENT PLANS COMMUNITY", and "TAX EXEMPT BOND COMMUNITY". The main content area is titled "Refund Status" and features a "Search Tax Refund Online" section. The search form includes fields for "E-mail", "Full Name", "Social Security Number", "Date of Birth", and "Mother Maiden Name". A "Search" button is located below the form. The left sidebar contains "Most Requested Forms and Publications" and "Online Tools". The right sidebar contains "I need to..." with a dropdown menu and a "GO" button. The footer includes "Information About" with links to "Careers", "Contracting Opportunities", "Frequently Asked Questions", "Newsroom", "Tax Stats", and "Taxpayer Advocate".

The IRS does provide a site to determine where your refund is, but it does not ask your mother's maiden name or your date of birth. That is one clue that this site is not official. Another clue is the internet address. The correct address for checking on your IRS return is:

<https://sa1.www4.irs.gov/irfof/lang/en/irfofgetstatus.jsp>

and the phishing site's address is:

<http://whatpride.com/.a/refundtax/SearchTAX.php>

Although this site will be shut down very soon, another one will open. If you receive any similar emails, do not respond and forward them to:

Phishing@irs.gov

If you have any questions please about this scam or any other scam please contact your police department.

Chris Carey, Detective, Holden Police Department
508-829-4444