

IRS Bad Form Scam

It seems that almost every month there's a report of yet another identity theft scam. The latest is particularly worrisome because it plays off Internal Revenue Service forms, something the IRS says hasn't happened before. The scam involves a cover letter from a "bank" and a doctored IRS form. One of the phony forms is numbered W-9095 and titled "Application Form for Certificate Status/Ownership for Withholding Tax." It mimics the genuine IRS Form W-9, Request for Taxpayer Identification Number and Certification. In addition to seeking the consumer's name, address and Social Security number, the sham form asks for very detailed financial information, including bank account numbers, passwords and personal identification numbers (PINs) and personal details such as a mother's maiden name. The letter says the form must be faxed to a certain number within seven days, or the "bank" will begin holding 31 percent of the account's interest for taxes. A related scam that targets foreigners with accounts in the United States features a doctored version of IRS Form W-8BEN, Certificate of Foreign Status of Beneficial Owner for United States Tax Withholding. A totally fictitious IRS form, W-8888, also is in circulation, the IRS said. The IRS says it has no figures on how many people have been caught up in the latest scam, but the agency has received complaints from around the country. Foreigners have been victims, too, the IRS says. The California Society of Enrolled Agents, a professional association of tax experts licensed by the Treasury, and other groups have been trying to warn the public about the scams. "Criminals have become more brazen because they've learned that they can profit from identity theft," said Bill Geideman, an enrolled agent in Santa Ana, Calif. "And they're much harder to trace than thieves who walk into a 7-Eleven with a handgun." IRS spokeswoman Peggy Riley said people should be wary of anyone soliciting personal information from them. "The IRS would not normally send out these forms, and the IRS would not ask for sensitive financial data," she said. She said that anyone receiving such solicitations should not respond to them. Instead, she said, call the IRS at 800-829-1040 or visit them on the web at http://www.ustreas.gov/irs/ci/tax_fraud/index.htm