

Beware tax scams

HMRC regularly warn taxpayers to be alert to fraudsters purporting to be from HMRC. Recently, they announced that in the last year they deactivated more than 20,000 fake HMRC websites, an increase of 29% on the previous year.

HMRC have also called on people to stay vigilant to avoid falling for tax refund scams. The scams typically take the form of the fraudster sending a fake email or SMS text promising a tax rebate in order to trick people into disclosing their bank account and personal details. In reminding people to be aware, Mel Stride, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, said:

‘HMRC only informs you about tax refunds through the post or through your pay via your employer. All emails, text messages, or voicemail messages saying you have a tax refund are a scam. Do not click on any links in these messages, and forward them to HMRC’s phishing email address and phone number’.

Fraudsters will often use events such as the end of the tax year or the self-assessment filing deadline to target people.

Staying safe

To avoid falling foul of fraudsters, people should:

- not give out private information, such as personal data, bank account details, PIN numbers etc.;
- not reply to text messages purporting to be from HMRC;
- not download attachments or click on links in emails that are unexpected.

HMRC and genuine organisations, such as banks, will not contact individuals out of the blue and ask for PIN numbers, password details or bank details. Suspicious emails should be forwarded to HMRC (phishing@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk) and suspicious texts to 60599. Alternatively, individuals who are the victim of an attempted fraud can contact Action Fraud on 0300 123 2040 or report the fraud using their online tool.

HMRC publish guidance on how to recognise genuine HMRC contact. This can be found on the Gov.uk website at www.gov.uk/government/publications/genuine-hmrc-contact-and-recognising-phishing-emails/genuine-hmrc-contact-and-recognising-phishing-emails.

Partner note: See www.gov.uk/government/news/hmrc-warns-on-tax-refund-scams and www.gov.uk/government/news/record-number-of-fake-hmrc-websites-deactivated.