Australian Government
Australian Taxation Office

Media release

04 December 2019

Savvy scammers exploiting deadlines to target Aussies

The Australian Taxation Office (ATO) is warning the community about scammers taking advantage of tax payment deadlines to scam unsuspecting victims.

Late last year, we saw the biggest ever peak in money being lost to scammers pretending to be from the ATO.

Around $2 million was lost from November 2018 to January this year.

Assistant Commissioner Karen Foat said “I’m particularly concerned about the sophistication these scammers keep showing. They are getting better at impersonating large organisations and ramp up in periods where people expect to hear from us, to make their threats appear more legitimate.

“While some taxpayers will have tax payments due from November, the ATO will always let you know how much you owe and the due date when we send your notice of assessment.

“If you’re unsure, you can check if you have a legitimate debt anytime by logging into your myGov account, or by contacting us or your tax agent.

“Our work to inform the community has paid off. We are seeing an increase in the number of people reporting scams and a decrease in the number of people handing over money to scammers. But any money going to scammers is too much.

“So far this year, 622 people paid over $2.1 million to scammers impersonating the ATO.

“We see these ATO impersonation scams by phone, email, SMS and even through message apps such as WhatsApp.

“We’ve also recently spotted scammers using the cardless cash feature offered by many banks. Through this feature, victims are sent codes to withdraw cash from an ATM, which they then read out to the scammer.

“One Sydneysider was duped out of $500 through this tactic. After a client alerted him that he was scammed, he reported the incident to us.

“In October, we also saw a spike in email and SMS scams, often asking people to update their personal details. These scams usually contain links to fake online services to get personal information that enables scammers to steal your identity”, Ms Foat said.

Remember, the ATO will never:

- use aggressive or rude behaviour, or threaten you with immediate arrest, jail or deportation
- project our number onto your caller ID – so people can be sure that if there’s a number on their caller ID, it’s not the ATO calling

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- request payment of a debt via cardless cash, iTunes or Google Play cards, pre-paid Visa cards, cryptocurrency, or direct credit to a personal bank account
- send an email or SMS requesting you click on a hyperlink to log on to government services

If you receive a call, email or SMS and aren't sure, it's OK to hang up or not respond. Instead, you can phone the ATO's dedicated scam line 1800 008 540 to check if it was legitimate. You can also report a scam online at ato.gov.au/reportascam.

To see our latest alerts and for more information, visit: ato.gov.au/scams

Scam text message example