



Beware of HMRC-related scams

There has been a sharp increase in the amount of scams involving fraudsters impersonating HMRC. There is also expected to be a surge in January due to the self-assessment period and also in July due to tax credit renewals.

The latest scam that HMRC is warning the public about targets vulnerable and elderly people. The fraudsters either cold-call their victims, pretending to be from HMRC; leave an automated voicemail or send a text asking for an urgent call back. They then claim that the person owes a large amount of tax and threaten that they will have to seize the victim's property or involve the police if they don't pay up using digital vouchers or gift cards. They then ask for the card or voucher's serial number to be read out over the phone. These are easy for the scammer to sell on or redeem the value themselves.

Temporary Detective Chief Inspector Lara Xenoudakis, City of London Police, said:

"Fraudsters perceive the elderly and vulnerable as easy targets, so we are urging people to be wary of HMRC-related frauds to protect themselves, family members and friends.

"We have received an increasing number of reports in which we have been told that people are being asked to pay fraudsters in iTunes vouchers. People should be cautious of unsolicited emails, calls or letters and always check directly with HMRC to ensure they are legitimate before responding."

There have been over 1,500 reports involving this type of scam with the average financial loss being £1,150 per person.

As well as cold-calls, there are other ways the fraudsters target taxpayers. These include HMRC-related phishing or bogus emails, text messages and also social media. The number one piece of advice is to never disclose personal and private information in response to a communication that you are not 100% is genuine. If it doesn't seem 'right' notify HMRC.

A HMRC spokesperson stated that:

"HMRC will never notify you of a tax rebate, offer you repayment, or ask you to disclose personal or financial details by email or by text, and we recommend that if you cannot verify the identity of a caller that you do not speak to them.

"We continue our work with law enforcement agencies around the world to bring down the criminals behind these scams. Last year HMRC closed more than 14,000 fake websites and continues to protect customers by constantly searching for these types of activity."

Visit GOV.UK for information and guidance on how to avoid and report scams and recognise genuine HMRC contact. If a scam has resulted in financial loss contact Action Fraud on 0300 123 2040 or use their online fraud reporting tool.

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