



Self-Assessment Season - Beware of the fraudsters

We are now fast approaching the 31 January deadline for the 2019-20 tax year and unfortunately this coincides with a pick-up in scamming activity by fraudsters pretending to be the tax office, potentially drumming up panic in taxpayers.

In 2020, HMRC responded to more than 846,000 reports of suspicious HMRC contact from the public and over 15,500 malicious web pages were reported to internet service providers in order for them to be taken down.

Karl Khan, interim director general for customer services at HMRC stated that:

“If someone calls, emails or texts claiming to be from HMRC, offering financial help or asking for money, it might be a scam. Please take a moment to think before parting with any private information or money.”

Some of the most common techniques fraudsters use include phoning taxpayers offering a fake tax refund or pretending to be HMRC by texting or emailing a link which will take customers to a false page where their bank details and money will be stolen. Fraudsters are also known to threaten victims with arrest or imprisonment if a bogus tax bill is not paid immediately. One phishing scam even offers a tax refund and is marketed as “Coronavirus (Covid-19) guidance and support” using HMRC branding.

HMRC operates a dedicated Customer Protection team to identify and close down scams but is advising people to recognise the signs to avoid becoming victims themselves. Genuine organisations like HMRC and banks will never contact their customers asking for PIN, password or bank details. Customers should also never give out private information, reply to text messages, download attachments or click on links in texts or emails which they are not expecting.

As already noted, it is highly unlikely that HMRC will contact people using text, email or the telephone. HMRC staff will never ask for personal details or bank information in this way.

If you are contacted and are unsure if the message is genuine, you can find out more information on GOV.UK. Please forward details of suspicious calls or emails claiming to be from HMRC to phishing@hmrc.gov.uk and texts to 60599. Individuals who have suffered financial loss should contact Action Fraud on 0300 123 2040, or use their online fraud reporting tool.

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