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Senior Citizens and Churches warned of Tax Scam

The IRS has sent out an alert especially to senior citizens and churches with small congregations of mostly low-income earners that there is a scam going around that targets them. The modus operandi of the scammers is to offer tax services to unsuspecting taxpayers that promise non-existent tax refunds or credits.

IRS spokesman Mark Green said, "We routinely get reports of return-related scams during tax season," and then went on to add that these scam reports usually become less after April 15. But this year appears to be different. Reports of scams still filter in to the IRS even past the middle of the year.

One of the main targets is small church congregations whose members, being mostly low-income earners, do not normally have a filing requirement. According to Green, "The scammers contact the churches advising them that many people in their congregation may be eligible for new tax credits or rebates, but they have to file returns to get them. They promise each individual a large refund, then offer to file the return for a substantial fee." The scammers would normally contact church leaders and request permission to address the congregation, often enticing them by offering them a cut of their fees.

The same kind of deception is given to senior citizens where scammers claim to be able to help them get a tax refund because of excess or withheld Social Security benefits. In reality, there is no such thing as a Social Security tax refund. Sadly, many senior citizens get conned out of divulging their Social Security numbers and other personal details by these scammers.

The IRS advises anyone who comes across such schemes to immediately get in touch with them before engaging anyone they don't know to help them file tax documents, especially if they involve "new" rebates or credits.

What you should do if confronted with a proposal of this kind is to first of all verify if it is legitimate. If so, then approach the IRS for help to file the necessary documents to get your refund, as whatever assistance you need in filing the right documents can be obtained from the IRS itself. Green cautioned, "Don't be misled by scam artists who hide behind churches or church leaders to convince you to file a tax return for bogus credits or rebates. These scammers are only trying to line their own pockets."

Always remember the old adage, 'If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is'.