

Spam emails related to tax refund; Bogus Charities Appealing for Aid to Burma

Jacksonville, FL. – The Better Business Bureau (BBB) passed along an FBI warning today to be on the lookout for spam emails which appear to be from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). The emails are actually another example of phishing, an attempt to steal consumer information.

“We’ve seen numerous cases of phishing in recent years. Oftentimes, the fraudulent message appears to be coming from a bank or other financial institution. In this case, the name of the IRS is used,” said Tom Stephens, president and CEO of the BBB serving Northeast Florida.

The spam email advises the recipient that a direct deposit is the fastest and easiest way to receive his or her tax rebate. The message contains a hyperlink to a fraudulent form which requests the recipient’s personally identifiable information, including bank account information. The message warns that failure to complete the form in a timely manner will delay the issuance of the rebate check.

“We want consumers to be aware that the IRS does not initiate taxpayer communications via email,” Stephens said. “Furthermore, the IRS does not request detailed personal information via email or ask taxpayers for private information like PIN numbers and passwords.”

The BBB warns consumers not to open emails from unknown senders. Many contain viruses or other malicious software. It is also recommended that consumers avoid clicking links in emails from unknown senders. The links can direct victims to phishing Websites.

Bogus Charities

Stephens also warned of bogus charities that may be seeking donations for victims of the cyclone devastation in Burma (also known as Myanmar).

“We all want to help the victims of this horrible tragedy, but we should be very careful before writing a check to a charity whose name we don’t recognize,” he said.

Stephens said it is not unusual for some so-called charities to “come out of the woodwork” following a disaster. “Many of the appeals are legitimate, but some are not,” he said. “Be especially cautious with solicitations that are based on emotion and ask for an immediate contribution.”

Those who wish to contribute, he added, should first do their due diligence. Take the time to check out the charity before writing that check. Reports on many of the nation’s charities are readily available at <http://northeastflorida.bbb.org>

The BBB in Northeast Florida serves 20 counties in the Northeast Florida including Jacksonville, Gainesville, Tallahassee, St. Augustine and surrounding counties. The nonprofit organization was established in 1987 to advance responsible, honest and ethical business practices and to promote customer confidence through self-regulation of business. Core services of the BBB include business reliability reports, dispute resolution, truth-in advertising and consumer & business education.

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