

Sheriff's Office offers tips to help prevent tax return fraud - 02/06/2013

SEMINOLE CO. (2/6/13) - Tax season is underway and the Seminole Financial Crimes Task Force urges residents to take steps to prevent tax return fraud. This type of identity theft occurs when thieves use someone else's social security number and personal information to file a tax return and fraudulently collect a refund. Individuals typically do not know they have been victimized until their legitimate tax return is rejected because a fraudulent one has already been filed.

The Task Force offers these prevention tips:

- File your tax return early;
- Monitor your bank account regularly to ensure any fraudulent transactions are identified promptly;
- Check your credit report every three to four months to ensure all information is correct;
- Don't give personal information over the phone or through email unless you initiated the contact and are certain you are providing the information to a legitimate person;
- Have updated antivirus software installed in your computer system, and remove any malware from your existing system; and
- Avoid using unsecured wireless networks - they can be hotspots for cyber thieves looking to access your data and personal information.

In 2012, there were 121 reports of tax return fraud reported to the Seminole Financial Crimes Task Force, up from 60 reports the previous year. If you discover someone has already filed a tax return in your name, file a police report with your local law enforcement agency immediately and then place a fraud alert with the three major credit reporting agencies. Law enforcement will help you complete selected IRS forms which will aid in the investigation and can also provide information about the Taxpayer Advocate Service.

The Seminole Financial Crimes Task Force investigates financial crime and is comprised of officers from the Seminole County Sheriff's Office and the Altamonte Springs, Casselberry, and Sanford Police Departments. Additional prevention tips and information can be found on the IRS website at: <http://www.irs.gov/uac/Identity-Protection-Tips>.