

The Virgin Islands Consortium

US Attorney in VI and IRS Criminal Investigation Unit Issue Warning on New Wave of Covid-19 and Economic Impact Payments Scams

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Gretchen C.F. Shappert, U.S. attorney for the District of the Virgin Islands, and Tyler R. Hatcher, acting special agent in charge for Internal Revenue Service, Criminal Investigation (IRS-CI) based in the Miami Field Office, on Monday announced an effort to prevent taxpayers from falling victim to criminals engaged in fraud schemes.

According to the release, in the last several months, IRS-CI has seen a variety of Economic Impact Payment (EIP) scams and other financial schemes designed to steal money and personal information from taxpayers. Criminals are taking advantage of the

second round of Economic Impact Payments – as well as the approaching tax filing season – to trick honest taxpayers out of their hard-earned money.

“With the roll-out of additional Economic Impact Payments intended to relieve the adverse impact of the coronavirus pandemic, con artists and scammers are using every opportunity to take advantage of innocent people. All Americans should take care to protect their personal information— especially during tax season—and to resist ‘too-good-to-be-true’ claims related to COVID-19 and Economic Payment scams,” said Ms. Shappert. “We encourage concerned citizens to contact local or federal law enforcement if they receive emails, text messages, or phone calls which seem suspicious. If you see something, say something.”

“Economic relief efforts are meant to assist those in most need who have been affected by the COVID19 pandemic. Criminals think these funds are an easy target to take advantage of innocent people,” warned Mr. Hatcher. “But we have other plans for those who try to prey on the public, and we are committed to hold them accountable for their criminal actions. Report any phone calls, emails, or text messages asking for your personal information or offering a deal that seems too good to be true.”

Some common COVID-19 scams include:

- Text messages asking taxpayers to disclose bank account information under the guise of receiving the \$1,200 Economic Impact Payments.
- Phishing schemes using email, letters and social media messages with key words such as “Coronavirus,” “COVID-19,” and “stimulus” in varying ways. These communications are blasted to large numbers of people and aim to access personally identifying information and financial account information (including account numbers and passwords).
- The organized and unofficial sale of fake at-home COVID-19 test kits (as well as offers to sell fake cures, vaccines, pills, and professional medical advice regarding unproven COVID-19 treatments).
- Fake donation requests for individuals, groups and areas heavily affected by the disease.
- Bogus opportunities to invest in companies developing COVID-19 vaccines while promising that the “company” will dramatically increase in value as a result.

Although criminals are constantly changing their tactics, taxpayers can help protect themselves by acting as the first line of defense, said the U.S. attorney's office in the USVI. The best way to avoid falling victim to a scam is knowing how the IRS communicates with taxpayers. The IRS does not send unsolicited texts or emails. The IRS does not call people with threats of jail or lawsuits, nor does it demand tax payments on gift cards.

IRS-CI continues investigating hundreds of COVID-19-related cases with law enforcement agencies domestically and abroad and educating taxpayers about scams.

COVID-19 scams should be reported to the National Center for Disaster Fraud (NCDF) Hotline at 1-866-720-5721 or submitted through the NCDF Web Complaint Form. The

NCDF is a national coordinating agency within the Department of Justice's Criminal Division dedicated to improving the detection, prevention, investigation and prosecution of criminal conduct related to natural and manmade disasters and other emergencies.

Taxpayers can also report fraud or theft of their Economic Impact Payments to the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA). Reports can be made online at [TIPS.TIGTA.GOV](https://tips.tigta.gov).

Taxpayers who receive unsolicited emails or social media attempts to gather information that appear to be from either the IRS or an organization closely linked to the IRS, should forward the message to phishing@irs.gov. Taxpayers are encouraged not to engage potential scammers online or on the phone.

To learn more about COVID-19 scams and other financial schemes visit [IRS.gov](https://www.irs.gov). Official IRS information about COVID-19 and Economic Impact Payments can be found on the Coronavirus Tax Relief page, which is updated frequently.