



**Weld County
District Attorney's Office
Nineteenth Judicial District**

**Kenneth R. Buck - District Attorney
Philip M. Clark - Assistant District Attorney**

Fraud Alert!

DON'T FALL HOOK, LINE AND SINKER FOR FRAUDULENT EMAILS

Weld County District Attorney Kenneth R. Buck would like you to take note of the following information so that you aren't the next victim.

A concerned citizen forwarded an email to me and asked if it was a scam. The email appeared to be from the IRS as it had the official IRS logo and explained that the email recipient was eligible for a tax refund of a specific amount. The email also contained a direct link ("click here") to access the form needed in order to obtain the refund. There was even a threatening line stating that "...deliberate wrong inputs are criminally pursued and indicated."

With a quick check to the IRS site, I found exactly what I was looking for—this email was indeed a scam. In a November 30, 2005, press release from the IRS, a consumer alert regarding this scam was published. The release explained that the IRS does not ask for personal identifying or financial information via unsolicited emails and that taxpayers do not have to fill out a form to obtain their refund.

So how can you tell if an unsolicited email is factual or fraudulent? After all, this email had the IRS logo on it, came from the email address service@irs.gov, and even showed a copyright at the bottom of the page.

First, be wary of any unsolicited email. The technique used in this scam is called "phishing", and if you use email you have undoubtedly come across similar scams. As the word implies, the person sending the email takes on the guise of someone else (usually a bank or business) and attempts to gain your personal information. The email is the bait and you are fish. If you fall for the hook (the "click here" line in this case), you will be asked to supply valu-

able personal information such as bank account numbers, social security numbers, etc. The scammer can then take that information and do irreparable harm to your credit and financial well-being.

Second, if you have taken the time to read the email, look for any misspellings. Scammers often leave typos or misspellings in their documents which are an instant red-flag that the email may be fraudulent. In the case of this email, the letter states that "...deliberate wrong inputs are criminally pursued and *indicated*." The word should be *indicted* since criminal charges are being threatened.

Third, stop and think about the logic behind the email. If you have paid your income taxes in the past, the government already has your name, address, date of birth and social security number. Ask yourself why would you need to send them information they already have in their possession. The same goes for banks and credit card companies — they have all the information the need from you already. If you truly question the authenticity of the email, call the entity directly (but not to a phone number provided in the email). Alert the entity to the email and, if needed, ask the entity to repeat the information they already have on file for you so you can confirm or deny that that information is correct.

Finally, a word on copyrights. Don't be fooled into thinking an email is official because it contains a copyright. Copyrights are placed on intellectual, creative and artistic works — not emails.

**Contact your local police agency if you think you are a victim of a crime.
To contact the Weld County District Attorney's Office, call (970) 356-4010 ext. 4702.**

Post Office Box 1167 • 915 Tenth Street • Greeley, CO 80632 • (970) 356-4010 • FAX (970) 352-8023

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