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Montana Revenue Department averting tax fraud from identity theft

Helena – The nationwide increase in identify theft has led to a jump in fraudulent tax returns, making tax fraud one of the fastest growing crimes in the country. These fraudulently filed refund requests contain fictitious and stolen identity information.

The Montana Department of Revenue has seen a dramatic increase in the number of fraudulent returns in the last couple of years because of the rise in identity theft. So far this tax season, the department has intercepted about 80 fraudulent state income tax returns and stopped approximately \$143,000 in fraudulent claims for tax refunds.

In tax year 2012, the department discovered 979 fraudulent returns and prevented \$783,000 in fraudulent refunds. That number took a big jump over tax year 2011, when we intercepted 142 fraudulent returns and prevented \$227,000 in fraudulent refunds.

Taxpayers can reduce their chances of having their identities used in tax fraud by filing their taxes as early in the tax season as possible.

“Not only do you receive your tax refund faster when you file early, but by filing early you reduce your chances of becoming a victim of tax fraud,” said Montana Revenue Director Mike Kadas. “The department is vigilant about stopping fraud and we can work together with taxpayers by giving fraudsters less time to try to steal your money.”

Identity theft is now the most reported crime in the country. “Identity thieves can live anywhere, steal key pieces of your personal information, and file a fraudulent tax return in your name,” said Attorney General Tim Fox. “Our Office of Consumer Protection is available to help Montanans arm themselves with information so they can protect their identities and their peace of mind.”

For more information about guarding against identity theft and what to do if you think you’ve become the victim of the crime, please contact the Montana Department of Justice’s Office of Consumer Protection at (800) 481-6896 or (406) 444-4500, or visit <https://doj.mt.gov/consumer/for-consumers/identity-theft/>

Since the beginning of tax season, the Montana Revenue Department has processed about 171,280 individual income tax returns. It has issued 146,770 refunds to taxpayers that amount to \$57.7 million dollars. The average refund amount is \$393. For more information about your refund, visit www.revenue.mt.gov and click on Taxpayer Access Point, or call our call center staff at 1-866-859-2254, or 444-6900 if calling from a local Helena number.

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