

Some Americans Confess They'd Rather Get a Root Canal Than Do Their Taxes

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Procrastination may be putting taxpayers at risk for tax-related identity fraud

LifeLock, a Symantec company and leading provider of proactive identity theft protection services, today unveiled findings from its recent survey* conducted online by Harris Poll, examining individual sentiment about paying taxes and awareness of tax-related identity fraud.

Since Americans seem to genuinely dislike having to file and pay taxes, many procrastinate on getting them done, but delaying might put taxpayers at greater risk for identity fraud—when someone uses a person's stolen personal information to file and claim a tax return. The March survey found that:

- Nearly a quarter of Americans say they tend to wait until the last minute to file taxes, with baby boomers ages 55-64 more likely than younger generations to procrastinate (32 percent vs. 20 percent of those ages 18-54).
- Roughly one in six Americans (16 percent), especially Millennial men ages 18-34 (29 percent), would rather get a root canal than do their taxes.
- More than one in three Americans (35 percent) feel that filing taxes is worse than having to floss.

"Much like having dental work done, filing taxes can be a painful experience—especially if you become a victim of tax-related identity fraud," said Joe Gervais, LifeLock's security communications director. "Submitting fraudulent tax returns in your name and claiming the refund is a relatively easy thing for criminals to do, so the earlier you file, the less likely someone else may beat you to the punch."

For criminals, tax-fraud is the ultimate crime to commit, explains Eva Velasquez, president and CEO of the Identity Theft Resource Center. "It's easy for the criminal to mask their location in order to avoid ever being caught, and it's also physically safer to commit than many other forms of crimes. The potential payoff of tax fraud is far more than many criminals could ever hope to make with other run-of-the-mill crimes."

So what does a criminal need to file a fake tax return? Unbeknownst to many, all a thief needs is a person's Social Security number, name, and date of birth to file a fake tax return. This information is often stolen from data breaches and email phishing scams.

Tax refund fraud is one of the biggest challenges facing the IRS. In 2016, the IRS identified approximately \$4.1 billion in suspected identity theft related to tax-refund fraud. Still, it's not a crime that many Americans recognize, according to the LifeLock survey. In fact, 27 percent of Americans said they have never heard of tax-related identity fraud prior to participating in the survey, including 36 percent of Millennials ages 18-34.

"It's nearly impossible to detect tax-related identity fraud before a person files their taxes but there are ways to help protect yourself," said Gervais. "Taxpayers need to be careful about what personal information they share online and with financial institutions since any shared personal data can potentially be stolen and used to commit tax-related identity fraud."

The good news is there are actions individuals can take to secure their personal information:

- Contact the IRS to see if you're eligible for an [Identity Protection PIN](#) which is a six-digit code assigned to you by the IRS to help prevent misuse of your social security number on fraudulent federal income tax returns.
- Watch out for fake "phishing" emails disguised as sent by the IRS, and if you receive one, forward it to phishing@irs.gov. The IRS will never contact you by email, text, or social media. If the IRS needs information, it will contact you by regular mail.
- Don't use public Wi-Fi hotspots to file your tax returns online. Just because a public Wi-Fi hotspot requires a password does not mean that your data is safe from an attacker on the same network.
- Monitor your credit cards for unauthorized charges, as well as your credit report for new accounts

that you didn't open. Fraudulent activity may indicate that you're at higher risk of further fraud, including stolen tax refunds.

- Store copies of tax returns in a safe place and shredding all paper documents no longer needed such as tax paperwork older than four years.

**This survey was conducted online within the United States by Harris Poll on behalf of LifeLock from March 16-20, 2017 among 2,198 U.S. adults ages 18 and older. This online survey is not based on a probability sample and therefore no estimate of theoretical sampling error can be calculated. For complete survey methodology, including weighting variables, please contact media@lifelock.com and for more tips about reducing the risk for tax-related and other identity fraud, visit LifeLock's [blog](#).*

About Symantec

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