

The Internal Revenue Service is warning consumers about a new scam in which con artists send legitimate-looking e-mails to people in an attempt to steal their personal and financial information.

In some cases, phony e-mails are being sent so they can download malware, or malicious computer code, onto the recipient's computer when the recipient opens an attachment to the e-mail or click on a link within it. Malware can take over the victim's computer hard drive, allowing someone to remotely access the computer. It can also look for passwords and other information and send them to the scammer.

The IRS is warning taxpayers to be aware of a recent scam in which recipients receive an e-mail that claims to come from the Electronic Federal Tax Payment System (EFTPS). EFTPS is a tax payment system that allows individuals and businesses to pay federal taxes electronically via the Internet or phone.

"The e-mail states that tax payments made by the e-mail recipient through EFTPS have been rejected," said Gregg Semanick, the IRS spokesman for Connecticut. "The e-mail then directs recipients to a bogus website containing malicious software that infects the intended victim's computer. To avoid the bogus website and malware, do not click on any links, open any attachments or reply to the sender for any e-mail you may receive that claims to come from EFTPS."

The IRS and the Financial Management Service, the Treasury bureau that owns EFTPS, never communicate payment information through e-mail, he said.

Forward any suspicious-looking e-mails claiming to be from the IRS to the agency at phishing@irs.gov.