

IRS News Release

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IRS's Top Ten Identity Theft Prosecutions; Part of Ongoing Efforts to Protect Taxpayers, Prevent Refund Fraud

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WASHINGTON — Continuing its enforcement push against refund fraud and identity theft, the Internal Revenue Service today announced the Top Ten Identity Theft Prosecutions for Fiscal Year 2014 (FY14). The ongoing efforts to bring identity thieves to justice remains a significant priority as part of the IRS's comprehensive identity theft strategy focusing on preventing, detecting and resolving identity theft cases as soon as possible.

"Identity theft is a crime that carries significant consequences, and these cases send a warning to criminals," said Richard Weber, Chief, IRS-Criminal Investigation. "Our top 10 cases represent the seriousness of these crimes and the magnitude of the consequences that will be faced by those who victimize honest taxpayers and steal from hard-working Americans."

Learn more about identity theft and what the IRS is doing to combat it at IRS.gov/identitytheft. You can also read IRS [Fact Sheet 2015-1, IRS Combats Identity Theft and Refund Fraud on Many Fronts](#), and IRS [Fact Sheet 2015-2, Identity Theft Information for Taxpayers and Victims](#).

The summary of the following 10 identity theft cases is based on public information available in court records:

Top Ten Identity Theft Cases

1. Couple Sentenced for False Tax Refund Conspiracy - On April 24, 2014, in Charlotte, North Carolina, Senita Birt Dill and Ronald Jeremy Knowles, were sentenced to 324 and 70 months in prison, respectively. Both were also ordered to pay \$3,978,211 in restitution to the IRS. Dill and Knowles pleaded guilty to false claims of conspiracy and access device fraud. Dill also pleaded guilty to aggravated identity theft. Dill and

Knowles used fraudulently obtained personal identification information (including names, dates of birth and social security numbers) to file false tax returns claiming tax refunds. Dill and Knowles used neighboring addresses to fill out the fraudulent tax returns and checked the homes' mailboxes frequently to retrieve the fraudulent refund checks upon delivery. The defendants also used addresses in Greenville and Greer, S.C., which belonged to Knowles' businesses. Dill and Knowles filed over 1,000 false tax returns using the fraudulently obtained personal identification information.

2. Georgia Man Sentenced for Tax Fraud and Identity Theft - On Aug. 25, 2014, in Atlanta, Georgia, Mauricio Warner was sentenced to 240 months, three years of supervised release, ordered to pay \$5,041,869 in restitution and forfeiture of bank accounts that contained \$4,185,455. Warner was convicted on wire fraud, aggravated identity theft, filing false claims, and money laundering. Warner filed over 5,000 false tax returns using the names and social security numbers of unsuspecting victims that were told they could submit an application for an "Obama stimulus payment" or "Free Government Money" by providing their names and social security numbers. In addition to word-of-mouth marketing, Warner used toll-free telephone numbers to collect victims' personal identifying information.

3. Dallas Men Sentenced for Role in Massive Stolen Identity Refund Fraud Scheme - On May 15, 2014, in Dallas Texas, Ogiesoba City Osula was sentenced to 210 months in prison and ordered to pay \$15.9 million in restitution. Osula was convicted on conspiracy to commit wire fraud, mail fraud and bank fraud; presenting fraudulent claims upon the U.S.; access device fraud and aiding and abetting; and aggravated identity theft and aiding and abetting. Previously sentenced were co-defendants: George Ojonugwa, sentenced to 174 months and ordered to pay \$15,979,187 in restitution; Eseos Igiebor, sentenced to 96 months and ordered to pay \$9,660,658 in restitution; Ebenezer Legbedion, sentenced to 40 months and ordered to pay more than \$1 million in restitution; and Evelyn Nyaboke Haley sentenced to 60 months and ordered to pay approximately \$5.7 million in restitution. The defendants conspired to defraud the United States by using stolen identity information and false information to create and electronically file false tax returns to claim refunds. On Nov. 8, 2011, police in a Cincinnati suburb questioned Osula and Ojonugwa, who were in a parked car. When the vehicle was searched, police found more than \$300,000 in cash and money orders and numerous debit cards. During that incident, while Osula was in a police car and waiting to be questioned, he ate a debit card.

4. Floridian Sentenced in Identity Theft Tax Fraud and Social Security Schemes - On Sept. 17, 2014, in Miami, Florida, Kevin Cimeus, was sentenced to 156 months in prison and three years of supervised release. Cimeus was convicted of conspiracy to steal government property or money, theft of government money or property, access device theft, and aggravated identity theft. Federal agents found over 2,400 social

security numbers and names of real people stored on thumb drives, laptop computers, iPad, and Cimeus' email account at Cimeus' residence. Cimeus recruited Miami Dade College students to allow him to use their bank accounts to receive fraudulently obtained tax refunds. Cimeus also used his own bank accounts to receive fraudulently obtained tax refunds. Cimeus filed at least one thousand tax returns from two IP addresses. He also used the two IP addresses to access the Social Security Administration's web site and create online profiles for social security recipients in order to re-route the victims' social security payments to other accounts.

5. Ohio Man Sentenced for Participation in \$3.5 Million Identity Theft Scam - On Aug. 21, 2014, in Columbus, Ohio, Roma L. Sims was sentenced to 100 months in prison, three years of supervised release, and ordered to pay \$3,517,534 in restitution to the IRS. Sims pleaded guilty to aggravated identity theft, wire fraud and conspiring to commit identity theft in a scheme to defraud the IRS. Sims advertised through various means in order to collect personal identification information from low-income or unemployed single parents with children. After tricking the innocent individuals who responded into providing their personal identification information, Sims prepared and filed false income tax returns in their names. Sims also obtained additional personal identification information by conspiring with Robert Earthman, who had access to the Kentucky child support enforcement database, which contained personal identification information of single parents with children who were recipients of child support. In total, Sims was responsible for the preparation and filing of approximately 977 income tax returns for the 2010 - 2012 tax years. Samantha C. Towns was sentenced to three years of probation and ordered to pay \$1,312,513 in restitution to the IRS. Robert S. Earthman was sentenced to 24 months in prison, three years of supervised release and was ordered to pay \$1,312,513 in restitution to the IRS.

6. New York Tax Preparer Sentenced for Filing False Tax Returns and Aggravated Identity TheftOn April 24, 2014, Mahamadou Daffe, a tax preparer in Queens, N.Y., was sentenced to 102 months in prison and three years of supervised release. Daffe was found guilty of conspiracy to steal government funds, theft of government funds, conspiracy to file false claims, wire fraud, and aggravated identity theft in connection with the preparation and filing of nearly 1,000 false income tax returns submitted online using stolen identities.

7. Alabama Man Sentenced for Scheme Using Prisoner Identities to Obtain False Tax Refunds

On April 29, 2014, in Montgomery, Ala., Harvey James was sentenced to 110 months in prison, three years of supervised release and ordered to pay \$618,042 in restitution. James pleaded guilty to mail fraud and aggravated identity theft. James and his sister, Jacqueline Slaton, obtained stolen identities from various individuals, including one person who had access to inmate information from the Alabama Department of

Corrections. James and others used those inmate names to file federal and state tax returns that claimed fraudulent refunds. Vernon Harrison, a U.S. Postal Service employee, provided James with addresses from his postal route, which were used as mailing addresses for the fraudulent prepaid debit cards and state tax refund checks. In total, James filed over 1,000 federal and state income tax returns that claimed over \$1 million in fraudulent tax refunds. Slaton was sentenced to 70 months in prison and Harrison was sentenced to 111 months in prison.

8. Several Sentenced in \$19 Million Tax Fraud Conspiracy - On December 30, 2013, in Anchorage, Alaska, Joel Santana-Pierna and Abel Santana-Pierna, citizens of the Dominican Republic residing in Alaska, were sentenced to 135 months and 72 months in prison, respectively. In addition, they were ordered to pay \$559,755 in restitution to the IRS and agreed to forfeit approximately \$130,000 obtained as part of their drug trafficking activities. The brothers pleaded guilty to conspiracy to distribute cocaine and conspiracy to defraud the government. The Santana-Pierna brothers conspired to use more than 3,000 stolen Puerto Rican identities to file false income tax returns and obtain large income tax refunds to which they were not entitled. In total, eleven individuals have been sentenced in this scheme with sentencing ranging from probation to 135 months in prison.

9. Woman Sentenced for Tax Fraud and Aggravated Identity Theft -

On Oct. 22, 2014, in Orlando, Florida, Tanya Fox was sentenced to 240 months in prison for conspiracy to defraud the federal government, wire fraud, theft of government property, and aggravated identity theft. Fox was also ordered to pay a money judgment in the amount of \$4,055,735. On July 24, 2014, Fox was found guilty by a jury of one count of conspiracy, five counts of wire fraud, ten counts of theft of government property, and ten counts of aggravated identity theft. According to court documents, Fox orchestrated a scheme to file fraudulent tax returns using identities that had been stolen from a variety of sources. Fox directed other individuals to open business bank accounts in the name of a fraudulent tax preparation business and to have the tax refunds deposited into those accounts. She then worked with those individuals to withdraw the funds and she spent the money on several luxury and other vehicles, cosmetic surgery and to open a restaurant in the Orlando area. Four others have been sentenced for providing approximately 2,400 names from the Orange County Health Department to Fox, with sentencing's ranging from five years to two years and six months in prison.

10. Bogus Charity Operator Sentenced for ID Theft and Wire Fraud Scheme - On June 12, 2014, in Columbus, Ohio, Jonathan Webster was sentenced to 108 months in prison, three years of supervised release and ordered to pay \$1,457,936 in restitution. Webster pleaded guilty to wire fraud and aggravated identity theft. Webster purchased advertising in newspapers representing himself as a charity seeking to provide financial

assistance to others. Webster set up an online website where individuals responding to the advertisements could provide their names and social security numbers. Webster and a co-conspirator electronically filed more than 500 false income tax returns using the names and social security numbers of the individuals.

Statistical Information

In fiscal year 2014, the IRS initiated 1,063 identity theft related investigations. Criminal Investigation enforcement efforts resulted in 748 sentencing as compared to 438 in FY 2013, an increase of 75 percent. The incarceration rate rose 7.1 percent to 87.7 percent. The courts also imposed more jail time in 2014, with the average months of those being sentenced rising to 43 months as compared to 38 months in FY 2013. The longest sentence was 27 years.

Enforcement Efforts

During FY 2014, Criminal Investigation dedicated significant time and resources to bringing down identity thieves attempting to defraud the federal government.

The nationwide Law Enforcement Assistance Program provides for the disclosure of federal tax return information associated with the accounts of known and suspected victims of identity theft with the express written consent of those victims. There are now more than 755 state/local law enforcement agencies from 47 states participating. Since the start of the program, more than 6,776 requests were received from state and local law enforcement agencies.

The Identity Theft Clearinghouse (ITC) continues to develop and refer identity theft refund fraud schemes to CI Field Offices for investigation. Since its inception in FY 2012, it has received over 7,600 individual identity theft leads. These leads involved approximately 1.47 million returns with over \$6.8 billion in refunds claimed.

CI continues to be the lead agency that investigates identity theft and is actively involved in more than 78 multi-regional task forces or working groups including state, local and federal law enforcement agencies solely focusing on identity theft. CI has one of the highest conviction rates in all of federal law enforcement -- at 93.4% -- and is the only federal law enforcement agency with jurisdiction over federal tax crimes. CI is routinely called upon to be the lead financial investigative agency on a wide variety of financial crimes including international tax evasion, identity theft and transnational organized crime.