

Approximately 10 million people still get their tax refunds by check. That makes it easy for criminals to steal money and the victims may not realize it until the check's been cashed. I'm looking at how thieves go about stealing tax refund checks and what you can do to prevent it from happening to you.

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0-8 Jamey Tucker/whatthetech.tv

ON-CAMERA TEASE

Do you have your tax refund check in the mail? I'll bet you can't wait until it's delivered. So do bad guys. I'm Jamey Tucker, coming up I'll show thieves know when a check is in the mail, and what you can do to prevent them from taking it.

ANCHOR INTRO

TAX REFUNDS ARE STARTING TO ROLL OUT FROM THE INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE AND ABOUT 9 MILLION AMERICANS STILL CHOOSE TO RECEIVE THEIR REFUNDS BY MAIL.

THAT'S ROUGHLY 30 MILLION DOLLARS GOING TO MAILBOXES OVER THE NEXT SEVERAL WEEKS. AND THIEVES ARE LOOKING FOR THEM. OUR CONSUMER TECHNOLOGY REPORTER JAMEY TUCKER EXPLAINS WHY THAT MAKES YOUR REFUND CHECK A TARGET, AND WHAT YOU CAN DO TO PREVENT IT FROM BEING STOLEN.

PACKAGE SCRIPT

No one looks forward to tax season like the bad guys. It's a lucrative crime. Refunds average a little over \$3,000. And in just 2 seconds, the check can be gone without the victim knowing it.

Police say bad guys will follow mail delivery trucks. Seconds after the dropoff, the crooks pull up, grab what's in the mailbox and take off.

They'll change the name on the check and cash it. Victims don't report it right away because they never knew it was delivered.

If you're getting a refund from the IRS, keep an eye on its website for when it'll be delivered. [IRS.gov/refunds](https://www.irs.gov/refunds) will give you a heads-up when to expect it. You'll just enter your social security number and filing status along with the exact amount of the refund.

You can also download the IRS app, IRS-2-Go for updates.

If you haven't done it already, sign up for the Postal Services' Informed Delivery. You'll get an email every morning about what mail is going to be delivered that day. Grayscale photos or scans of every piece of mail that's out for delivery to your mailbox.

If a piece doesn't make it to your mailbox, you can report it missing. It's also a quick way to place a hold on deliveries if you're going to be out of town.

The FBI urges people to sign up for their address because if they don't, the bad guys can register your home and get notifications of what's coming to your mailbox.

It isn't just refund checks the bad guys are after. The Postal Service and the FBI warn that crooks are looking for any personal information, and just one piece of mail, like a bank statement, can include everything they need to steal your identity.

That's What the Tech, I'm Jamey Tucker

ANCHOR TAG

IF YOU ARE EXPECTING A REFUND CHECK IN THE MAIL AND DO NOT RECEIVE IT, REPORT THE MISSING MAIL TO THE POSTAL SERVICE, THE IRS, AND THE POLICE DEPARTMENT.

WEB STORY

While most Americans file their taxes electronically and receive a refund by direct deposit, some 9 million taxpayers still choose to receive a check in the mail. That number has declined in recent years but it still presents an opportunity for bad guys.

With average refunds exceeding \$3,000, refund checks become a prime target for theft. Opportunistic criminals are known to follow mail carriers through neighborhoods and, once the truck is out of sight, they'll open the mailbox, take what's there, and drive off.

Once the crook has it in hand, they're known to change the name on the check and find a place that will cash it. That's not easy to do these days, but it does happen to taxpayers who choose to receive their refunds by mail.

Here's how to safeguard yourself if you still have a check mailed to you from the IRS.

Track your refund: The IRS website ([IRS.gov/refunds](https://www.irs.gov/refunds)) allows you to check the status of your refund using your Social Security number, filing status, and refund amount.

- **Download the IRS2Go app:** Stay updated on your refund status with the official IRS app.
- **Sign up for Informed Delivery:** This free service from USPS provides daily email notifications with grayscale images of your expected mail. This way, you can quickly identify missing or suspicious items.

- **Secure your address:** The FBI recommends registering your address with USPS Informed Delivery to prevent criminals from enrolling your mailing address and receiving updates on what's coming to your mailbox.
- **Consider direct deposit:** While some prefer paper checks, direct deposit into your bank account is the most secure way to receive your refund and avoid the risk of theft.

Remember, criminals are after more than just refund checks. They target any mail containing personal information. By taking these precautions, you can protect yourself from identity theft and ensure you receive your hard-earned refund safely.