

## HMRC warns of scam tax rebate emails

HM Revenue & Customs reports a 47pc increase in 'phishing' emails sent to customers in the three months to January

HMRC will never contact customers who are due a tax refund via email.

The taxman is warning people not to be caught out by bogus emails pretending to offer customers a tax rebate after seeing a surge of almost 50pc in consumers reporting being targeted by these "phishing" scams.

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) said that 23,247 phishing emails were reported to it in the three months leading up to the online self-assessment deadline on January 31 - marking a 47pc increase on the same period a year earlier.

During 2013, customers reported more than 91,000 phishing emails to HMRC.

Emails sent as part of the scam often begin with a sentence such as: "We have reviewed your tax return; according to our calculations of your last year's accounts a tax refund of (an amount of money) is due."

The conmen behind the emails try to trick victims into handing over their bank account or credit card details. Typical details requested in these emails include the victim's name, address, date of birth, bank account number, sort code, credit card details, National Insurance number, passwords and mother's maiden name.

Anyone responding to this type of email risks opening their bank account to fraudsters and having their details sold on to other organised criminal gangs.

This year, HMRC has seen a record-breaking 8.48 million tax returns filed online by last Friday's deadline.

Its actions to combat scammers have led to websites being closed down around the world, including those based in the United States, Russia and elsewhere. The revenue body said that in 2013 it closed down 1,476 websites sending scam phishing emails.

Last month, the revenue body shut down 178 websites which it found were the source of these emails, up from 65 in January 2013.

There is often a spike in criminals flooding people's inboxes with bogus messages around this time of year as some people might be expecting to get a tax rebate.

But legitimate tax rebate forms, called P800s, from HMRC will contain a payment order and will never ask for credit or debit card details.

Gareth Lloyd, head of digital security at HMRC, said: "HMRC never contacts customers who are due a tax refund via email - we always send a letter through the post.

"If you receive an email claiming to be from HMRC which offers a tax rebate, please send it to [phishing@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:phishing@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk) and then delete it permanently. We can, and do, close these websites down, and do all we can to ensure taxpayers stay safe online by working with law enforcement agencies around the world to target the criminals behind these scams."

HMRC strongly advises customers who receive such an email to check the advice published at <http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/security/index.htm> where examples of these fake emails are listed.

People should not click on websites or links contained in suspicious emails or open attachments. Anyone who has answered one of these emails should forward the email and disclosed details to [security.custcon@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:security.custcon@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk).