

SCAM

Police warn of IRS phone scam

Local residents receive fraudulent phone calls threatening arrest.

By Jorge Millan
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The Stuart Police Department is warning of a phone scam in which a caller identifies himself as working for the Department of Treasury and threatens the potential victim with arrest if taxes aren't paid immediately.

A Stuart resident was targeted recently, with the caller claiming the resident had not paid \$5,400 of taxes to the Internal Revenue Service in 2011

and 2012. When the resident began questioning the caller, he hung up.

Aaron Markoff, a businessman from Boca Raton, said he can relate.

Markoff, 41, received a call around two weeks ago in which the caller stated that Markoff had not responded to a year's worth of certified letters regarding unpaid taxes and that Palm Beach County sheriff's deputies were on their way to arrest him.

"It came in as a 202 (Washington, D.C.) area code," Markoff said. "You just assume it's official. It sounded legit."

Markoff said that the caller spewed off specifics of the

tax law and referred to sections that he had violated.

The caller didn't initially ask for money, telling Markoff that he was involved only in prosecuting cases and "there's nothing we can do" to help him avoid arrest. The man then indicated to Markoff he might be able to find out how much was owed and put him on hold, presumably to transfer the call.

While Markoff was on hold, he researched the caller's phone number of 202-609-7070 on the Internet. The first post that shows up has a subject line that reads, "Do not answer the phone if the number dialing in is (202) 609-7070."

The IRS says it has received

90,000 complaints to date about the scam, and about 1,000 people have lost an estimated \$5 million.

When the caller got back on the phone, Markoff volunteered to ring the police. The man, who Markoff said spoke with accented English, hung up.

Markoff, owner of a graphic design and printing company, said he's afraid more naive targets of the scam may get hurt.

"They scare you like your life is over," Markoff said. Law enforcement advises anyone who receives a call like this to hang up and call police.

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