Be on the Lookout for 2020 Census Scams

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The 2020 census is approaching next spring, and forms are already being compiled to be mailed to U.S. households. With any large political event or happening, scammers try to take advantage of the public and this could soon mean a rise in census scams .

This important process comes around every ten years, and it helps with things like ensuring a region has adequate representation in Congress, adequate school funding and is cited in scientific research and social surveys. However, it is also time-consuming and can feel really invasive. Page after page will ask questions that might not seem to be anyone's business. What is your household income? How many cars do you own? How many children do you have and how old are they? How many televisions do you have?

Increase in Government Imposter Scams

Unfortunately, there has been an increase in identity theft and fraud that masquerades as government agency communications, which could mean an increase in census scams.

Scammers try everything from claiming your Social Security number has been suspended to threatening you with police action for unpaid taxes. They can even spoof their email address or phone number on your caller ID to seem legitimate.

There is every reason to suspect that scammers will take advantage of the publicity surrounding the 2020 census in order to steal your information as part of a census scam. They may even threaten you with jail time if you do not immediately pay a fine since it is technically a crime to not fill out the census.

Here are some things to remember that will hopefully help you spot census scams:

The official website

The website for the Census Bureau is census.gov , and the specific website for the 2020 census is 2020census.gov . However, a scammer could easily buy the domain for 2020census.com or spoof their email by swapping a capital 0 for one of the zeros in the number. Remember, caller ID and email domain names are not proof that the person is legitimate.

They will not call you

If the Census Bureau tried to call every U.S. household and take their census data over the phone, we would be ready for the 2030 census before they were finished. They will not call you and request your information, no matter what your caller ID says . They will also not email you a link to complete it online, so never click a link in an email unless you are expecting it. If you get a call, it is a census scam.

They might come to your house, but will not request anything

In some areas, government volunteers serving as census takers will knock on doors. However, they will not request Social Security numbers, bank or credit card numbers or any other payment information. They will also not ask for payments for their time or for the postage on your forms, no matter what the person claims.

The police are not coming to your house

Regardless of what the person on the phone says, the police are not being sent to your house for failure to fill out the census. Yes, it is required under the law and it is vitally important for a variety of reasons, but the police are very busy. The caller who claims you can simply pay some kind of fine over the phone, especially with prepaid debit cards or iTunes gift cards, is lying to you. It is a census scam.

Contact the Identity Theft Resource Center for toll-free, no-cost assistance at 888.400.5530. For on-the-go assistance, check out the free ID Theft Help App from ITRC.