

# Taxpayer Alerts



## Criminals Impersonating State, Threatening to Seize Assets

Some taxpayers have received fraudulent letters claiming the state of Texas will seize their assets and property for unpaid taxes unless payment is made within seven days. **These illegitimate letters did not originate from the Comptroller's office.**

For years, criminals have used aggressive and threatening scam faxes, letters and phone calls impersonating state agencies. The criminals demand immediate payment, often via a specific payment method, and threaten to seize assets and property or significantly increase the liability if you fail to pay or provide sensitive personal information.

[See sample letter.](#)

Be incredibly wary whenever you receive unexpected messages like these, as they can be a trap. The criminals' threats are designed to get you to react by calling the criminals' phone number or clicking on a fake link to solve the problem. The consequences can be catastrophic. Not only can you lose your money, but if you click on links in scam emails or texts, you also could become a victim of identity theft or have malware installed on your phone or computer.

If you receive an unexpected message of this type, do not call the phone number or use the website or link provided in the letter, email or text. Most importantly, do not give the sender personal information or money. Instead, please [email us](#) or call the Comptroller's Collection Team at 800-252-8880.

Learn more about [protecting yourself from tax fraud](#).



## Homestead Designation Mailings



The appraisal district is regularly contacted by homeowners who have unnecessarily paid money to solicitors who, **for a fee**, offer to file homestead exemption forms. In most cases, the property owner is already receiving all qualified exemptions.

There is no charge for a homeowner to file his or her homestead exemption application with the appraisal district. Ector County Appraisal District (ECAD) urges property owners who receive these types of solicitations to check with the appraisal district **before** responding to the offer. These solicitations are not illegal, but they are completely unnecessary.

**July 2018**

### AG Paxton Issues Consumer Alert on Misleading Homestead Tax Exemption Offers

AUSTIN – Attorney General Ken Paxton today warned consumers to beware of businesses that are sending misleading letters to Texans offering a “designation of homestead” if they pay a fee. Counties make the standard homestead tax exemption available for free to property owners.

To date, the Consumer Protection Division of the attorney general’s office has received more than 100 complaints from individuals who received solicitations for these designations and, in some cases, sent back money for a homestead exemption.

“My office is actively reviewing all of the complaints and we will take whatever legal steps are necessary to stop unlawful activity by any company trying to take advantage of Texans,” Attorney General Paxton said. “I urge anyone who has received a solicitation offering a ‘designation of homestead’ that they believe is deceptive to please call my office’s consumer hotline at 800-621-0508 and report it.”

Texas consumers can also always report suspicious or fraudulent activity by filing a complaint with the attorney general’s office online at <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/cpd/file-a-consumer-complaint>.

**Before you pay any fees or agree to share any exemption refund monies, please contact the appraisal district. We will help you determine if there are any exemptions for which you qualify but are not yet receiving.**



## **Unclaimed Money Solicitations**



ECAD also receives complaints from homeowners after being misled by letters that offer to help them recover unclaimed government funds if the homeowner signs an agreement giving the solicitor a portion of the recovered money. Then, the solicitation firm simply provides the homeowner with a partially completed homestead exemption application form.

Once the homeowner has agreed to pay the solicitor a part of the refund, he or she loses that portion of any potential tax refund. Many of these firms may then sue in small claims court if the individual refuses to pay. Again, there is nothing illegal about this type of solicitation. And again, there is no benefit to the taxpayer.



## **Residential Exemption Information**



The homestead exemption is the single most important tax break available to homeowners. You are eligible if you meet these requirements:

- You owned and occupied your home on January 1<sup>st</sup> of the application year;
- Neither you nor your spouse has claimed a residence homestead exemption on any other property; and
- The mailing address listed on your Texas ID matches the property location listed on your homestead application.

Homeowners who are over 65 years of age, or who are totally and permanently disabled (as defined by Social Security) are eligible for additional exemptions. The exemption is effective for the year they turn 65 or become disabled.

For additional information about property tax homestead exemptions, contact ECAD. Our office hours are Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.