

# Can you spot a government imposter?

Your caller ID says “FTC” or “IRS,” and the phone number has the “202” Washington, DC area code. You might even look the number up and see that it’s a real government phone number.

But the person calling isn’t really from the FTC, IRS, or any other agency. It’s a government imposter whose goal is to convince you to send money before you figure out it’s a scam. The big giveaway? The caller wants you to send money.

What imposters might tell you:

A lot of imposters pretend they’re with the government to scare you into sending money. They say you owe taxes or some other unpaid debt, and, hoping you’ll panic, warn that you’re about to be arrested if you don’t pay up. Before you can investigate, you’re told to put the money on a prepaid debit card and tell them the number — something no government agency would ask you to do.

Other scammers promise you money — a big prize you need to claim. They say the FTC or some other agency is supervising the sweepstakes, and that the money will be released as soon as you pay for the shipping, taxes, or some other expense. But it’s all a fake. There is no prize and no money.

## What you should know

- Federal government agencies and employees **don’t** ask people to send money for prizes or unpaid loans. The FTC doesn’t supervise sweepstakes, and when the IRS contacts people about unpaid taxes, they usually do it by postal mail, not by phone.
- Federal government agencies and employees also **don’t** ask people to wire money or use a prepaid debit card to pay for anything. Prepaid cards and money transfers are like sending cash — once it’s gone, you can’t get it back.
- You can’t rely on caller ID. Scammers know how to rig it to show you the wrong information (aka “spoofing”). Scammers might have personal information about you before they call, so don’t take that as a sign they’re the real thing. If you’re not sure whether you’re dealing with the government, look up the official number of the agency. That way you know who you’re talking to.

## Who you can tell

- You can file a complaint with the FTC at [ftc.gov/complaint](https://www.ftc.gov/complaint) under “Scams and Rip-offs” and then “Imposter Scams.” If it involves the IRS, add “IRS Telephone Scam” in the notes.
- IRS imposter scams also can be reported to the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA) online or at 800-366-4484. If you think you owe federal taxes, call the IRS at 800-829-1040 or go to [irs.gov](https://www.irs.gov).