

Finance and HR Employees – Beware of W-2 Phishing Fraud Schemes

Danger

A common scheme during tax season is for a criminal to impersonate a high-level person at an organization and ask for copies of employees' W-2 forms. This information is then used to file fraudulent tax returns or commit identity theft. The result is that employees may suffer immediate harm.

How to spot a W-2 phishing e-mail

- The sender claims to be traveling and available only by email
- The sender claims to need the information urgently
- The request is formatted to look like it's sent from a mobile device in order to make it harder for you to recognize that something is off
- The sender's email address will be similar to our CEO/CFO's – often off by only a character or two. For example,

CEO@company_xyz.com versus
CEO@company-xyz.com

- The request is often for a PDF of all W-2s, but can also be for just a list of employee names, addresses, earnings, and Social Security numbers

Tips to protect yourself

- Get verbal confirmation from the person supposedly making the request
- Know our procedures for handling legitimate requests for this type of information
- Carefully confirm the email address that the message was sent from
- Report any phishing attempts immediately

Who?

The request is usually made to look like it comes from the CEO, CFO, or other high level executive.

How?

The request typically comes by e-mail.

What?

Requests may look like this:

- Can you send me the updated list of employees with full details (Name, Social Security Number, Date of Birth, Home Address, Salary).
- I want you to send me a copy of all employees W-2 wage and tax statements for 2019 for review, I need them in PDF file type, you can send it as an attachment. Kindly prepare the lists and email them to me asap.
- Hi [name of targeted employee], I'm travelling and have an urgent need for a PDF of all the W-2s that we've prepared for this year. I don't have time to explain but please send it as soon as possible. Thanks [CEO or CFO]

When?

Most prevalent during tax season (December – April).

And that's not all

Another similar but unrelated scheme is to make the request look like it comes from the IRS.

The IRS will not contact you by phone or email to request your company's W-2s.