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Stimulus check in mail? Help offered to ensure it

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WORLD-HERALD BUREAU

WASHINGTON -- There's nothing quite like cash money to grab the public's attention.

Phone lines have been buzzing at the Internal Revenue Service and lawmakers' offices. People want to know about their economic stimulus checks.

"We're getting inundated with calls," said Rep. Lee Terry, R-Neb.

Officials are holding events, sending out mass mailings and enlisting community groups in their effort to inform the public, to ensure that everyone entitled to a payment receives one and to shut down con artists who have baited identity-theft traps with the promise of speedy stimulus payments.

Terry is holding a press conference today to discuss the ins and outs of the checks.

"I don't think a lot of these seniors know that they have to file a tax return to get a stimulus check," Terry said. "We want them to know there's help out there and how to access it."

Rep. Adrian Smith, R-Neb., visited a senior citizens center in Columbus on Wednesday to encourage people to follow the proper steps in order to get a check.

Acting IRS Commissioner Linda Stiff recently reported that the agency was receiving 50,000 calls a day about the stimulus payments, which will start arriving in May.

Individuals can receive up to \$600 and couples \$1200, with an additional \$300 per child younger than 17. The distribution schedule is tied to Social Security numbers and the method of delivery.

The IRS is reaching out to people who do not have to file an income tax return but still qualify for a stimulus check. The only way to receive that payment is to file a return.

Workers who earn less than \$8,750 if single, \$11,250 if a single parent or \$17,500 if married are not required to file a tax return. However, if they had at least \$3,000 last year in qualifying income then they may be eligible for a stimulus payment.

Qualifying income includes certain Social Security, Veterans Affairs and Railroad Retirement benefits.

Forms and instructions are available on the IRS Web site. The agency also is mailing 20.5 million informational packets to Social Security and Veterans Affairs recipients.

About 100,000 of those went to people in Nebraska and approximately 200,000 to people in Iowa.

But even those who don't receive the packet should look into whether they qualify, said IRS spokesman Chris Miller.

The government does not have mailing addresses for many low-income people, so the IRS has asked charities, churches and community groups that work with poor people to spread the word.

Volunteers are establishing community sites in Iowa and Nebraska where the confused can receive free face-to-face guidance regarding their returns and the stimulus checks. Information on those sites is available by dialing 211, Miller said.

The IRS always sees a spike in scams around the April 15 tax filing time. But recent ones have used the stimulus check as a lure. For example, an e-mail will inform recipients that they can receive their money faster through direct deposit if they provide their personal information and bank account number.

The IRS will never contact anyone by e-mail or phone and ask for personally identifiable information, Miller said.

Community volunteer sites are being set up around Iowa and Nebraska where the confused can receive free face-to-face guidance regarding their tax returns and the stimulus checks.

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## **Payment schedule**

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The Internal Revenue Service is using the last two digits of your Social Security number to target the release of your stimulus check. The target dates:

**DIRECT DEPOSIT**

Last 2 digits

Send to bank

00-20

May 2

21-75

May 9

76-99

May 16

**PAPER CHECK**

Last 2 digits

In mail by

00-09

May 16

10-18

May 23

19-25

May 30

26-38

June 6

39-51

June 13

52-63

June 20

64-75

June 27

76-87

July 4

89-99

July 11

