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Despite its acclaimed safety, many Missourians may still have apprehensions when filing taxes online. *Photo courtesy of IRS*

E-filing: Tips and warnings for state's online taxpayers

With warmer weather launching spring into full swing, it can be very easy to put off one of the most important spring tasks: filing taxes. Even though the April 15 deadline is approaching quickly, many Missourians still have not filed taxes. Taxpayers can be at ease, however, because the Internal Revenue Service offers a convenient e-filing option to help those with time constraints.

According to the IRS, filing income taxes online results in faster refunds, greater accuracy and quick confirmation, giving taxpayers assurance during a usually stressful time. Other benefits include secure and confidential submission, a "file now, pay later" option, 24/7 access, and the ability to confidentially save tax information for next year. Because of these benefits, the popularity of e-filing is increasing dramatically. As of March 6, 2009, more than 18 million income tax returns were filed using home computers—20 percent more compared to just

one year ago.

The IRS also considers e-filing to be the most secure method of handling sensitive tax information because of secure online submission. The lack of paper trails associated with e-filing prevents tax forms from getting lost in the mail and therefore inhibits the increased risk of identity theft, ultimately ensuring the safety of last-minute filing.

Despite its acclaimed safety, many Missourians may still have apprehensions when filing taxes online. For maximum security, follow safety measures from experts like Chris Lloyd, a technical support representative and installer at Socket, a Missouri-based telephone and Internet provider.

"There are a number of precautions you should take when submitting private information via the Web," states Lloyd. "Ensure passwords are secure, remember to log out of all tax-related programs upon completion

of the session, and if you choose to use an online tax preparation service, check the privacy policies before selecting one."

The Internet also identifies secure websites with specific addresses and symbols. Make sure the tax preparation Web address begins with "https" to indicate it is a secure site. In addition to the specific URL, secure sites are identified with either a closed padlock or unbroken key icon at the bottom of your Web browser.

Aside from secure online submission, e-filing is a reliable way to ensure information is properly recorded by the IRS in a timely manner. When filing taxes on paper, IRS employees must retype all handwritten information, so messy handwriting and human error can result in information being entered incorrectly. By automatically calculating computations, e-filing also prevents common mathematical errors that are made on paper tax forms.

