

Identity Theft

What is ID Theft???

Identity Theft...more commonly known as ID Theft, is the fraudulent use of someone's name and a personal identifying number to obtain credit, merchandise or services.

Personal identifying numbers include:

- Social security number
- Drivers license number
- Checking or savings account number
- Credit or debit card numbers
- Any other number that can be used to access a person's financial resources

ID Theft is one of the fastest growing crimes in the United States.

How can ID Theft affect me?

According to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), people who have had their identities stolen may spend months or years and thousands of dollars cleaning up their credit histories and clearing up their name. In the meantime, those victims may lose job opportunities, be denied credit or loans, or even be arrested for crimes they did not commit. The victim deals with endless calls from creditors on loans they did not take out and uses their personal time and resources to make phone calls, write letters and fill out affidavits to close these accounts that they did not open. **The victims are that have to prove that they are indeed victims.**

Think it can't happen to you???

- An FTC study released in September of 2003 found that 27.3 million Americans have been victims of identity theft in the last five years
- That same study showed that (1 in 8) adults nationwide learned that they had been a victim of identity theft in the past five years
- In the past year alone, almost 10 million adults were victims of identity theft.

How can my information be used?

A suspect can use your information to:

- Open credit card accounts in your name or add authorized users to your existing accounts
- Open bank accounts in your name
- Obtain loans in your name (real estate, auto or personal)
- Establish utilities (power, gas or phone) in your name
- Obtain cell phone accounts in your name
- Counterfeit checks using your bank account information and drain your account

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How can someone obtain my information?

An individual can obtain your personal information by:

- Stealing your wallet or purse
- Breaking in to your vehicle
- Stealing your mail
- Filling out a change of address form to divert your mail to another address
- Going through your trash looking for financial documents or pre-approved credit offers
- Going through the trash at businesses or "dumpster diving"
- Stealing it from businesses where you are a customer, patient, student or getting it from an employee who may have access to the information
- Scamming you into giving it to them. They may pose as an employee from a legitimate sounding business and ask you for the information to open up or to update an account
- Gathering the personal information that you share on an unsecure website

What can I do to protect myself??

While it is impossible prevent identity theft entirely, there are steps that you can take to reduce the risks of becoming a victim.

- Review your credit reports with the three major credit bureaus annually to ensure the accuracy of those reports
- Know who you are giving your personal information to and how it will be used
- Minimize the amount of personal information that you carry in your wallet. Do not carry extra credit cards or your social security card
- Do not place outgoing mail in your mailbox—place outgoing mail in a secure box
Install a locked mailbox for incoming mail or use a post office box
- **SHRED, SHRED, SHRED!!** Never throw away financial documents, receipts, or pre-approved credit offers without shredding them first. A shredder is a small price to pay for the prevention it offers.
- Reduce the amount of your information in circulation. Consider removing your name from the marketing lists of three major credit reporting agencies. This will limit the number of pre-approved credit offers you receive
- Never write down your passwords or personal identification numbers (PIN)...memorize **them!!!**
- Protect your social security number—release it only when necessary
- Pay attention to your billing cycles and follow up with companies if your bills do not arrive on time
- Secure personal information in your home so that it is not readily accessible to others
- Never leave personal or financial information in your vehicle
- Passwords protect your cellular, utility, credit card and bank accounts.

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I am victim of Identity Theft...What do I do now??

- File a report with the jurisdiction where the crime occurred.
- Contact one of the three (3) major credit-reporting bureaus (Equifax, Experian, or TransUnion) to report the fraud. Ask that a fraud alert be placed on your file and request a copy of your credit report. The other two credit bureaus will automatically be notified to place a fraud alert on your credit file and all three reports will be sent to you free of charge
- Review your credit report for accuracy
- Contact the creditors for the accounts that have been tampered with or opened fraudulently to close those accounts. Advise them of the fraudulent use of your information and request that they send you a fraud dispute form. Most creditors will accept the FTC fraud affidavit <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/pubs/credit/affidavit.pdf>
- File a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). The FTC maintains a database that law enforcement can use to assist with their investigations.

TIPS

- Act quickly and be persistent!!!
- Follow up with creditors in writing
- Keep a log documenting who you have spoken with and when you spoke with them
- Keep an organized file including any correspondence you have received and documentation you have collected
- Do not pay any bill or portion of a bill that is a result of a fraudulent account.