

Identity Theft: It can happen to you



Identity theft occurs when someone uses your personal information to access your bank or credit card accounts, open up new accounts in your name, or generally commit fraud or other crimes without your knowledge. According to the February 2010 "Identity Theft Fraud Survey Report" conducted by Javelin Strategy and Research, 11.1 million Americans were victims of identity theft in 2009 alone! Shockingly, almost half of all identity theft is perpetrated by someone you know. Don't let it happen to you!

You can significantly reduce your risk of becoming a victim. **Follow these tips to help reduce your risk:**

- ✓ Make sure any personal information in your home is secure.
- ✓ Keep your wallet or purse in a safe place at work, perhaps in a locked drawer.
- ✓ Make sure you memorize all passwords and PINs for your accounts. NEVER WRITE THEM DOWN. Avoid using obvious ones like your date of birth, telephone and social security numbers or a series of consecutive numbers. Be sure to change passwords every 3-6 months.
- ✓ Don't give out personal information over the phone, through the mail or on the internet, unless you initiated the contact. If relaying personal information on the web be sure the link you are using begins with "https". The "s" indicates a site is secure.
- ✓ Always shred documents containing personal information and cut up old credit cards before discarding.
- ✓ Never write your credit card account numbers on the outside of the payment envelope.
- ✓ If possible install a locked mailbox at your residence, use a Post Office Box and drop off sensitive mail at the Post Office whenever possible.
- ✓ Carry only the credit cards, debit cards and means of identification that you will need on each particular day. Don't carry your social security card with you unless it is absolutely necessary to do so.
- ✓ Don't open any emails or files sent to you by strangers.
- ✓ Before disposing of a computer delete all personal information off the hard drive.



Sadly, even if you are cautious, you can still be victimized.

Signs that you may have become a victim:

- ✓ You notice unexplained charges or withdrawals on your financial accounts
- ✓ You receive credit cards you didn't apply for
- ✓ You unexpectedly stop receiving bills or other mail
- ✓ You are denied credit (and you know your credit history is good).
- ✓ You receive calls or letters from debt collectors about merchandise or services you did not purchase.
- ✓ A merchant refuses to accept your checks because they claim you have a history of bouncing them (when you've never bounced a check before)

What to do if you suspect you are a victim:

- ✓ Place a fraud alert on your file by calling one of these credit bureaus. :
 - Equifax 1.800.525.6285
 - Experian 1.888.397.3742
 - TransUnion 1.800.680.7289
- ✓ Call each company where accounts were fraudulently opened in your name. Make sure you document the names of people you contact along with the date and any information they give you.
- ✓ Contact the Federal Trade Commission at 1.877.438.4338 to obtain an ID Theft Affidavit to send to the companies with fraudulent accounts.
- ✓ File a police report.
- ✓ Order your credit report from each of the three credit reporting bureaus to check and dispute errors. After you have contacted the businesses in question, continue to monitor your credit report to ensure fraudulent information has been removed.

Be sure to obtain your credit report at least twice a year thereafter to check for continuing errors and any strange activity. All citizens are entitled to one free credit report every twelve months from each of the three credit reporting bureaus by calling 1.877.322.8228 or by visiting www.annualcreditreport.com.

Important: According to the FTC, children are the latest targets of identity thieves. More than half a million youngsters have been victimized to date. Children are easy targets, because this crime can go undetected for many years. Be sure to always keep your child's social security number secure and when asked for it, question why it is needed. Children should have no credit history and should not receive credit card pre-approvals or telemarketing calls. If they do, this could indicate that their identity has been stolen. Unfortunately, the child identity thief is oftentimes someone you know.

Want to learn more? Call us for a no-cost consultation about this and other financial topics.

Toll free: 1.888.354.6332

Debt Counseling Corp. is a not-for-profit organization
providing education, counseling and advocacy to consumers like you.
3033 Express Drive North, Hauppauge, NY 11749
Licensed by the New York State Banking Department



DCC 7131
Rev: 3
06.14.10