

UALR SENIOR JUSTICE CENTER

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Identity Theft

What is Identity Theft?

According to the Federal Trade Commission identity theft “occurs when someone uses your personal information to commit fraud or other crimes” (ID Theft). The Privacy & American Business Survey reported in July of 2003 that since 1990, 33.4 million people in the U.S. have become victims of identity theft (How Many Identity Theft Victims Are There? What Is the Impact on Victims?). The Javelin/Better Business Bureau’s 2005 Identify Fraud Survey Report found that identity theft in the U.S. has an annual cost of \$52.6 billion (How Many Identity Theft Victims Are There? What Is the Impact on Victims?).

Facts regarding identity theft

- It takes one year, on average, for a person to find out they have been a victim of identity theft
- Identity theft can cause financial harm as well as emotional harm. Many victims of identity theft report that they feel violated as a result of the theft.
- Identity theft affects all age groups. Persons over the age of 50 account for 22% of identity theft victims (Identity Theft: An Update on the Experience of Older Complainants). Children can also become victims of identity theft.

Signs that your identity may have been stolen

- You are denied credit or offered credit at high rates for no reason. For example: You have good credit, but when you apply for a car loan, you are turned down for bad credit.
- You stop receiving bank statements, credit card statements, or other bills. This could mean that someone has stolen your mail or has illegally forwarded your mail to another location. If this happens you should contact the financial institution or the agency that you have service with. Also, call your local post office to see if they have a forward order.
- You begin receiving calls from creditors or debt collectors inquiring about accounts you never opened or services you never signed up for.

Ways in which information is stolen

- theft of wallet or purse
- theft of mail
- by going through a person’s trash and finding unshredded documents
- posing as a person who has a valid reason to access someone’s credit report (i.e. someone posing as a creditor)
- by buying the information from someone else
- by skimming (tampering with devices that run your ATM or credit card for the purpose of stealing your debit or credit card information)

Ways in which the stolen information may be used

- information may be used to obtain a driver's license, passport, or a state issued identification card
- information may be used to open credit accounts (by obtaining a credit card, taking out a loan, or even applying for a mortgage) or buy items on credit (such as in a furniture store)
- information may be used to empty an established bank account
- information may be used to rent property such as apartments or cars
- information may be used to open a bank account
- information may be used to establish services such as phone and utility services
- information may be used to completely take over your identity (For example: there have been cases in which a person is living under a stolen identity; they have a job and even file taxes under the stolen identity)
- information may be used during the course of a crime or during an arrest (For example: someone steals your identity and uses your name to defraud a company or someone is arrested and gives your name as their own upon arrest)

Tips for prevention of identity theft

- Guard your personal information closely. This includes your social security number and your bank account or other financial account numbers. Don't give this information to anyone unless you know that they have a valid reason for having it. Be especially wary of anyone asking for your personal information over the phone or the internet.
 - o Be wary of someone calling from an agency that you already do business with claiming that they need information from you. If you already do business with that agency, they will already have your personal information. For example: If someone calls and states that they are from your bank and they begin asking for personal information-tell them if they really need the information you will go to the local branch to provide it.
 - o Be wary of giving out your information to anyone who calls or emails you asking for personal information-especially if you did not initiate the contact or if you are not sure they are who they say they are.
- Shred any document that contains personal information. Again this information includes your social security number and your bank account or other financial account numbers. Instead of throwing away credit card statements, bank statements, credit card receipts, and credit card offers-Shred Them!
- Make sure you keep your passwords and PINs private. Don't use easily accessible information as your password or your pin number. For instance: don't use the last four digits of your social security number as your banking pin.
- Order a copy of your credit report and verify all the information it contains.
- Check all bank and credit card statements closely to verify that all charges are legitimate ones that either you or someone on the account made
- Don't carry your social security card with you
- Don't print your social security number or your driver's license number on your checks
- When you order checks, ask to pick them up from your bank rather than having them mailed

What to do if your identity is stolen

- Keep a log of each agency you contact. Include the date, the agency name, the person you spoke to, and if possible their extension number. Write any information they give you in the log book. If possible keep the original of any form or letter you send or at the very least keep a copy of any correspondence sent
- Call the credit reporting agencies (Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion) and request that they place a

fraud alert on your credit report

- Get a copy of your credit report and check it thoroughly. Continue checking it regularly for new fraudulent activity
- File a police report. Many financial agencies will require a police report so they can confirm your identity has been stolen
- Call the fraud department of the financial institution of each account that has fraudulent activity (this includes accounts that you opened that were fraudulently used and accounts that were fraudulently opened).
- File a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission and keep them updated as you receive additional information

Important Contacts

Credit Reporting Agencies

Equifax- 1-800-525-6285

Experian- 1-888-EXPERIAN (397-3742)

TransUnion- 1-800-680-7289

Other Important Numbers to know

Federal Trade Commission's Identity Theft Hotline- 1-877-IDTHEFT (438-4338)

The Federal Trade Commission works with investigators nationwide to help stop identity theft.

Social Security Administration- 1-800-772-1213

It is important to note that the Social Security Administration cannot help you if someone is using your social security number unless that person is using the number for employment or if someone is still fraudulently using your social security number after you have done all you can to stop the problem.

ChexSystems- 1-800-428-9623

ChexSystems is a consumer reporting agency that reports on checking accounts. If your checking account has been affected by identity theft or if someone opened up a checking account using your information you can contact ChexSystems so they can place a security alert on your file.

U.S. Postal Service- 1-800-275-8777

The above number can provide you with information on how to contact your local Postmaster. Let the Postmaster know if you suspect someone has gained your information using mail fraud (stealing your mail or illegally forwarding your mail).

Annual Credit Report- 1-877-322-8228

Under the Fair and Accurate Credit Transactions Act each person is entitled to one free credit report each year. Annual Credit Report was created by Experian, Equifax, and TransUnion. You can also receive your free annual credit report by going to <http://www.annualcreditreport.com>

OPTOutPreScreen.Com- 1-888-567-8688

This service will allow you to opt out of prescreened credit card and insurance offers for either five years or permanently. This means that your name will be taken off the list that the credit reporting agencies provide. Not all companies get their information from the credit reporting agencies, so this will not stop all credit and insurance offers. However, it will stop some of them.

AARP, (n.d.). Identity theft: an update on the experience of older complainants. Retrieved 11 16, 2005, from Policy & Research for professionals in aging Web site: <http://www.aarp.org/research/frauds-scams/fraud/are-search-import-919-DD102.html>.

Federal Trade Commission, (n.d.). Id theft. Retrieved 11 16, 2005, from Federal Trade Commission: Your National Resource About ID Theft Web site: <http://www.consumer.gov/idtheft/>.

Privacy Rights Clearinghouse, (n.d.). How many identity theft victims are there? What is the impact on victims?. Retrieved 11 16, 2005, from Identity Theft Surveys and Studies Web site: <http://www.privacyrights.org/ar/idtheftsurveys.htm>.

Social Security Administration, (n.d.). Identity theft and your social security number. Retrieved 11 16, 2005, from Social Security Online Web site: <http://www.ssa.gov/pubs/10064.html>.

U.S. Department of Justice, (n.d.). What can i do about theft and fraud?. Retrieved 11 16, 2005, from Identity Theft and Fraud Web site: <http://www.usdoj.gov/criminal/fraud/idtheft.html>.