

If you know or suspect you are a victim of identity theft, contact the fraud department at one of the three main credit bureaus listed below. Request that they place a fraud alert on your file and contact the other two bureaus on your behalf.

You may also wish to contact the Federal Trade Commission's Identity Theft Hotline:
1.877.IDTHEFT (1.877.438.4338)

CREDIT BUREAUS

EQUIFAX

Report Order: 1.800.685.1111
Fraud Hotline: 1.888.766.0008
www.equifax.com

EXPERIAN

Report Order: 1.888.397.3742
Fraud Hotline: 1.888.397.3742
www.experian.com

TRANS UNION

Report Order: 1.877.322.8228
Fraud Hotline: 1.800.680.7289
www.tuc.com

Practical Money Skills



PRACTICAL MONEY GUIDES

IDENTITY THEFT

How to safeguard your identity and financial information from theft

PROTECT YOUR PERSONAL FINANCIAL INFORMATION TO AVOID CARD FRAUD AND IDENTITY THEFT

When your personal and financial information falls into the wrong hands, the consequences can be devastating. Identity thieves can use it to steal money from your accounts, open new credit cards and apply for loans, among other crimes. The information provided here can help you avoid becoming a victim and explain what to do if you know or suspect that your identity has been stolen.

PRACTICAL MONEY GUIDES

- BUDGET BASICS
- CREDIT HISTORY
- CREDIT CARD BASICS
- DEBIT CARD BASICS
- PREPAID CARD BASICS
- IDENTITY THEFT**

Understanding how to manage your finances provides an invaluable tool to take control of your life. Wise use of these skills can provide peace of mind, financial freedom, increased buying power and a secure future. This guide is one of a series on **PRACTICAL MONEY SKILLS FOR LIFE.**

Practical Money Skills



For more information, visit
www.practicalmoneyskills.com



WHAT TO DO IF YOUR IDENTITY IS STOLEN

If you suspect you have been, or are about to be, a victim of identity theft, it is important to act quickly. Contacting the proper agencies and filing the necessary reports will go a long way toward minimizing damage to your financial well-being.

CREDIT BUREAUS Immediately contact the fraud department at one of the three main credit bureaus listed on the back of this guide and ask that they place a 90-day initial fraud alert on your credit file. Whichever bureau you contact will notify the other two to do the same. You'll be entitled to one free credit report from each bureau.

You can also request a security freeze, which prevents credit issuers from obtaining access to your credit files without your permission. This can help prevent thieves from opening up new credit cards or other loans in your name. There may be a fee associated with placing a security freeze on your credit files.

LAW ENFORCEMENT File a detailed identity theft report with the police department. Search the Federal Trade Commission's website (www.consumer.ftc.gov) for instructions on how to create and file a report. You'll also need to send copies of the report – by certified mail, return receipt requested – to the credit bureaus and companies whose accounts were impacted.

FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION (FTC) Although the FTC doesn't investigate individual identity theft cases, if you file a complaint they will share the information with an online database shared by thousands of civil and criminal law enforcement authorities, worldwide.

CREDIT CARD ISSUERS AND BANKS Contact the credit card issuer, which will closely monitor your account for odd behavior. They may either reissue a card with a new CVV (card verification code) number or issue an entirely new card number. Close affected bank accounts and obtain new ones. If checks were stolen, ask the bank to stop payments. Also, change any related passwords or PIN numbers and notify companies that have automatic payments tied to the account to make sure you don't miss a payment.

Six Ways to Protect Yourself

There are several simple steps you can take to reduce or minimize the risk of becoming a victim of identity theft or card fraud.

PRACTICE SAFE INTERNET USE Delete spam emails that ask for personal information, and keep your anti-virus and anti-spyware software up-to-date. Shop online only with secure web pages (look for "https" in the address bar and check for an image of a lock). Never send credit or debit card numbers, Social Security numbers and other personal information via email.

DESTROY PERSONAL FINANCIAL RECORDS Once they're no longer needed, shred credit card statements, ATM, credit/debit card/deposit receipts, loan solicitations and other documents that contain personal financial information.

SECURE YOUR MAIL Empty your mailbox quickly and get a mailbox lock. When mailing bill payments, checks and other sensitive documents, consider dropping them off at the post office or a secure mailbox.

GUARD YOUR SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER Thieves seek your Social Security number because it can help them access your credit and open bogus accounts. Never carry your card; instead, memorize your number and store the card securely. Don't have your number printed on checks and ask your employer to remove it from pay stubs and other correspondence.

CHECK YOUR CREDIT REPORTS Regularly review your credit reports for suspicious activity. You can request one free copy of each report per year at www.annualcreditreport.com; otherwise contact the three credit bureaus directly (Note: They'll charge a small fee).

BEWARE OF SCAMS Always be on the defensive with your financial information. Never give out personal information to telemarketers or via email from someone claiming to represent your bank, credit card issuer, a government agency, a charity, or other organization unless you initiated the contact. If you think the request is legitimate, contact the agency directly to confirm their claims.

Protect Your Children's Identities

Identity thieves are increasingly targeting children's identities, using their Social Security numbers to illegally obtain jobs, credit accounts, mortgages and car loans. Use the same precautions handling their personal information as with your own, and if you suspect identity theft, follow the same theft report procedures.

Tips For Frequent Travelers

Whether you're traveling for business or pleasure, be on the alert for opportunities that thieves may try to take advantage of:

- Receipts—Don't leave credit card receipts on restaurant tables; sign and hand them directly to the server. Keep your copy of all receipts.
- Wallets—Stolen wallets frequently lead to identity theft, so instead of carrying your wallet in your pocket or bag, consider using a travel pouch worn under your clothing.
- Checks—Leave your checkbook at home, safely stored.
- Camera phones—That tourist with a camera phone may actually be shooting your credit card or driver's license. Keep important personal information out of view from others.
- Mail—Put a delivery hold on your mail whenever you travel.
- Hotels—Lock up all valuables in room or hotel safes while you are out, including laptops, passports and other documents containing personal identifying information. Don't leave these items with a hotel doorman to transport or hold—carry them yourself.
- Airplanes—Don't put any items that contain your Social Security number, card or account numbers in checked luggage. Always carry those items in carry-on luggage.