



Protect Yourself Against Identity Theft

The loss or theft of personal data such as credit card, Social Security, and/or checking account numbers soared to unprecedented levels in recent years, according to financial experts...and the trend isn't expected to turn around any time soon. But you can reduce your risk of fraud by following these and other tips to guard your personal information!

#1: Deter

Identity theft is a serious crime. It occurs when your personal information is stolen and used without your knowledge to commit fraud or other crimes. Identity theft can cost you time and money. It can destroy your credit and ruin your good name.

Deter identity thieves by safeguarding your information.

- ✓ **Shred financial documents** and paperwork with personal information before you discard them.
- ✓ **Protect your Social Security Number.** Give it out only if absolutely necessary or ask to use another identifier.
- ✓ **Don't give out personal information** on the phone, through the mail, or over the Internet unless you know who you are dealing with. Avoid disclosing personal financial information when using public wireless connections.
- ✓ **Never click on links sent in unsolicited emails.** Instead, type in a web address you know. Use firewalls, anti-spyware, and anti-virus software to protect your home computer and keep them up-to-date.
- ✓ **Don't use an obvious password** like your birth date, your mother's maiden name, or the last four digits of your Social Security number.
- ✓ **Keep your personal information in a secure place** at home, especially if you have roommates, employ outside help, or are having work done in your house.

#2: Detect

Detect suspicious activity by routinely monitoring your financial accounts and billing statements.

Be alert to signs that require immediate attention...

- ✓ Bills that do not arrive as expected
- ✓ Unexpected credit cards or account statements
- ✓ Denials of credit for no apparent reason
- ✓ Calls or letters about purchases you did not make
- ✓ Charges on your financial statements that you don't recognize

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#3: Inspect

- ✓ **Your credit reports.** Credit reports contain information about you, including what accounts you have and your bill paying history.
 - The law requires the major nationwide credit reporting companies – Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion – to give you a free copy of your credit report every 12 months if you ask for it.
 - Visit www.AnnualCreditReport.com or call 1-877-322-8228, a service created by these three companies, to order your free annual credit report.
 - If you see accounts or addresses you don't recognize or information that is inaccurate, contact the credit reporting company and the information provider. To find out how to correct errors on your credit report, visit www.ftc.gov/idtheft.

#4: Defend

Defend against identity theft as soon as you suspect it.

- ✓ **Place a "Fraud Alert" on your credit reports and review the reports carefully.** The alert tells creditors to follow certain procedures before they open new accounts in your name or make changes to your existing accounts. Placing a fraud alert entitles you to free copies of your credit reports. Look for inquiries from companies you haven't contacted, accounts you didn't open, and debts on your accounts that you can't explain.
- ✓ **Contact the security or fraud departments of each company** where an account was opened or charged without your okay.
- ✓ **File a police report.** File a report with law enforcement officials to help you correct your credit report and deal with creditors who may want proof of the crime.
- ✓ **Report the theft to the Federal Trade Commission.** Your report helps law enforcement officials across the country in their investigations. Visit www.ftc.gov/idtheft or call 1-877-ID-THEFT (438-4338).

Common Ways Identity Theft Happens

Identity thieves use a variety of methods to steal your personal information including:

1. **Dumpster Diving:** They rummage through trash looking for bills or other paper with your personal information on it.
2. **Skimming:** They steal credit/debit card numbers by using a special storage device when processing your card.
3. **Phishing:** They pretend to be financial institutions, companies, or government agencies and send email or pop-up messages to get you to reveal your personal information.
4. **Hacking:** They hack into your email or other online accounts to access your personal information, or into a company's database to access its records.
5. **"Old-Fashioned" Stealing:** They steal wallets and purses, mail, including bank and credit card statements, pre-approved credit offers, and new checks or tax information. They steal personnel records from their employers or bribe employees who have access.

Questions? Call us at 978-462-3106 or email us at info@institutionforsavings.com.

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