

Identity Theft

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What is Identity Theft?

- ❖ Identity theft occurs when your personal information such as name, social security number, driver's license number or any other personal information is stolen to obtain credit, merchandise, or services in your name.
- ❖ Identity theft includes: opening bank accounts, writing checks, taking cash advances, obtaining loans, setting up a cell phone or other utility account, renting an apartment or getting employment in your name.

How it happens

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| ❖ Dumpster/Trash Diving | -Public Records |
| ❖ Stolen Mail | -Family members |
| ❖ Internet | -Questionable friends |
| ❖ Lost or stolen wallet or purse | -Stolen from businesses |

2004 US Dept. of Justice Statistics

- ❖ 3.6 million victims
- ❖ Most common victims are to households of annual income of \$75,000 or more, those living in urban or suburban areas, and households headed by 18 to 24 year olds.

Consumers become aware of problem by

- ❖ Issuer of credit card or other account
- ❖ Missing money or unfamiliar transaction on statement
- ❖ Banking problems
- ❖ Missing credit cards or checkbook
- ❖ Police
- ❖ Denied utility service
- ❖ Credit report

Latest Trends in the fastest growing crime in U.S.

- ❖ Person with camera-equipped cell phone snaps a picture of your personal data.
- ❖ “Phishing” on the internet- a pop-up on a legitimate site that directs you to a bogus site that asks you to verify your information. Contact the place of business if this should happen.
- ❖ E-mail spamming or spy ware
- ❖ Identity Thieves using your medical insurance card to obtain medical services and procedures for themselves.

Stay Alert!

- ❖ Pay attention for bills or other mail you didn't receive that month.
- ❖ Follow up if you receive a letter of denial for credit and haven't applied for anything.
- ❖ Get detailed information on any collection calls about accounts that you do not have or have not been using.
- ❖ Call about any credit cards you receive that you didn't apply for

Tips to avoid being a victim

- ❖ **Treat your mail and trash carefully:**
 - Deposit your outgoing mail in post office collection boxes or at your local post office, rather than in your home mail box.
 - Remove your mail promptly.
 - When out of town notify the post office or have a trusted person pick up your mail daily.

- If you travel frequently, use a P.O. Box.
- Tear or shred sensitive documents before disposing of them in the trash.
- Keep documents with vital information in a locked box, safe, or other hiding place especially Social Security cards, legal documents and credit card statements.
- Keep a list of your creditors, account numbers and phone numbers in the safe area also, in case of credit card theft.
- To opt out of credit card offers call- 1-888-5OPTOUT (888-567-8688).
- Reduce unsolicited mail- <http://dmaconsumers.org> or write to: Direct Marketing Association, P.O. Box 643, Carmel, NY 15012-0643.

❖ **Computer Security**

- Use an antivirus, or firewall Software, such as <http://lavasoft.com>. Ad-aware SE personal is free and can be downloaded from their site.
- Utilize Pop-up Blockers, for example <http://www.mozilla.com>, which is also a good web browser, and fewer viruses are geared here. There is a link on the home page to download firefox, which is also free.
- Create a password to log into your computer.

❖ **Active Military Personnel – Place an “active duty” alert on your credit report**

❖ Do not carry your Social Security Card

- Memorize the number. Give out your SSN only when necessary. Your employer and financial institution will need the number for wage and tax reporting purposes. You will also need it when applying for credit, renting an apartment and signing up for utilities in most cases. If someone else asks for your social security number ask these questions:
 1. Why do you need my social security number?
 2. How will my SSN be used?
 3. How do you protect my SSN from being stolen?
 4. What will happen if I don't give you my SSN? (Will I be provided with the service, etc)

❖ More Helpful Information

- Offer no personal information to merchants when using a credit card. If they require ID, such as a driver's license, do not allow such information to be written down or photocopied.
- Save all purchase and ATM receipts, and regularly check them against statements.
- Do not give out your credit card or bank account numbers over the phone to anyone you do not know or did not call yourself.
- Carry only the identification and credit cards you need when you go out.
- Be cautious about responding to mail or telephone promotions. Identity thieves may create something that looks legitimate to get your private information.
- Immediately change the marital status linked to your credit card account should you become married, divorced, or separated.
- Keep your purse or wallet in a safe place.
- When ordering checks, pick them up at the bank instead of having them mailed.
- Don't put entire account number on memo line of checks.
- Consider using only initials preprinted on your checks.
- Use work number and P.O. Box for address on checks.
- Don't sign credit cards- Put "photo I.D. required"
- Don't print your SSN on your checks.

❖ Pin Numbers and Passwords

- Don't use your Mother's maiden name
- Don't use consecutive letters or numbers (ABCD or 1234).
- Don't use your pet's name.
- Don't use your spouse or children's name.
- Don't use your own or family's date of birth or part of social security number.
- Don't use your wedding anniversary.
- Don't use your nickname.
- **Do** use letters and numbers in the same password, it is hard to decode for a hacker.

❖ Look at your credit report every 12 months at no charge

- www.annualcreditreport.com
- Call 1-877-322-8228
- Write to Annual Credit Report Request Service, P.O. Box 105281, Atlanta GA 30348-5281 (A request form is included at the end of packet).
- You may also request a report at no charge if you have been denied for credit, insurance, or employment within the last 60 days.
- You may purchase your report if you would like **another** copy within the 12 months from Transunion, Equifax, or Experian.
- Make sure all of your information is correct - name(s), addresses, employment, etc. If not make corrections with Transunion, Equifax, and Experian.

Identity Theft Victims: Immediate Steps

❖ **Place a fraud alert on your credit report. Call one of the three consumer reporting companies, who will contact the other two:**

1. Equifax, 1-800-525-6285, www.equifax.com, P.O. Box 740241, Atlanta, GA 30374-0241.
2. Experian, 1-888-EXPERIAN (397-3742) www.experian.com, P.O. Box 9532 Allen, TX 75013.
3. Transunion, 1-800-680-7289, www.transunion.com, Fraud Victim Assistance Division P.O. Box 6790, Fullerton, CA 92834-6790.

- Mail a letter to the Credit Reporting Agency you contacted, if it was by phone (See sample letter page 10).
- An initial alert stays on your credit report for at least 90 days.
- You will automatically receive copies of your credit report. Look them over carefully. Check that all of your personal information is correct, like SSN, addresses, names, middle initial, and employers.
- You can request an “extended alert”, which stays on your credit report for seven years. This entitles you to 2 free credit reports within 12 months and removes your name from marketing lists for 5 years, unless you request to be put back on before then

❖ **Close accounts you know or believe have been tampered with or opened fraudulently**

- First call and speak with someone in the fraud or security department.
- Follow up with a written letter (See sample letter, page 11). Send certified mail with return receipt for proof the companies received notification.

- To dispute charges on existing accounts ask the representative to send you the company's fraud dispute forms or use sample letter provided.
- Close bank accounts that have been tampered with.
- For new unauthorized accounts ask the representative if the company accepts the ID Theft Affidavit (at end of packet). If not, ask them to send their form. The ID Theft Affidavit is available on line at:
<http://www.consumer.gov/idtheft/pdf/affidavit.pdf>
 or by calling 1-877-IDTHEFT
- Request that the company send you documentation when the issue has been resolved.

❖ File a report with your local Police or in the community where the theft took place

- Get a copy of the report.
- If the authorities are unwilling or reluctant to file a police report, then ask to file a "Miscellaneous Incidents" report, or try another jurisdiction, like the county or state police. (Michigan law gives you the right to file a police report for Identity Theft).
- You can also check with your state's Attorney General office to check your state's law regarding identity theft.
- In Michigan, the Attorney General Office will get involved if a company insists on pursuing a debt after all of the other steps have been done.

❖ File a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission

- Call them at 1-877-IDTHEFT (438-4338);
 TTY 1-866-653-4261 (for the hearing impaired).
- Write to them at Identity Theft Clearinghouse, Federal Trade Commission, 600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington D.C. 20580.

❖ **If Your Mail is Stolen**

- Contact Post Office – Postal Inspection Service Office
- On line- www.usps.com/postalinspectors/mailthft.htm
- Fill out Form PS Form 2016, Mail Theft and Vandalism Complaint.

❖ **Contacting Social Security if you believe your social security number has been used**

- Online at www.socialsecurity.gov
- Call them at 1-800-269-0271, TTY 202-326-2502
- Write to the Social Security Administration Fraud Hotline, P.O. Box 17768, Baltimore, MD 21235.
- You may be able to get a new social security number (you cannot if you have filed for bankruptcy, are trying to avoid legal responsibility or if there is no evidence of ID theft).

❖ **If your checks were lost or stolen call your financial institution and next call these agencies**

- Chex Systems – 800-428-9623 – the check clearing company used by U of M Credit Union.
- Certegy Check Systems – 800-437-5120
- Telechex – 800-710-9898
- National Check Fraud Service – 843-571-2143
www.ckfraud.org. A company that puts out national alerts to financial institutions, gov't agencies and law enforcement for stolen checks and other ID theft issues.
- Check Center– 800-843-0760
- International Check Service – 800-526-5380

Internet Fraud

- ❖ **Internet Fraud Complaint Center –**
<http://www.ifccfbi.gov>
- ❖ **U.S. Secret Service –**
http://www.secretservice.gov/field_offices.shtml
- ❖ **Detroit branch of Secret Service – 313-226-6400**

More Information

- ❖ **Department of Justice –**
www.usdoj.gov/criminal/fraud/idtheft.html

Tips for Organizing your Case

- ❖ Write down the name of everyone you talk to, what they tell you to do, and the date of the conversation. Use the enclosed Chart Your Course of Action at the end of this packet.
- ❖ Follow up with everyone in writing.
- ❖ Keep copies of all the correspondence that you send.
- ❖ Keep the originals of the supporting documents, like police reports and letters from creditors.
- ❖ Set up a filing system for all of the paperwork pertaining to the issue.
- ❖ Keep old files even if you believe it has been resolved in case anything crops up.

Sample Blocking Letter to Credit Reporting Agencies

Date

Your Name

Your Address

Your City, State, Zip

Complaint Department

Name of Consumer Reporting Company (Transunion, Equifax, or Experian)

Address

City, State, Zip

Dear Sir or Madame:

I am a victim of identity theft. I am writing to request that you block the following fraudulent information on my file. This information does not relate to any transaction that I have made. The items are circled on the attached copy of the report I received. (Identify item(s) to be blocked by the name of source, such as creditors or tax court, and identify type of item, such as credit account, judgement, etc.)

Enclosed is a copy of the law enforcement report regarding my identity theft. Please let me know if you need any other information from me to block this information on my credit report.

Sincerely,

(signature)

Your Name

Enclosures: (List what you are enclosing)

Sample Dispute Letter (For Existing Accounts)

Date

Your Name

Your Address

Your City, State, Zip

Your Account Number

Name of Creditor

Billing Inquiry Dept.

Address (not the payment address)

City, State, Zip

Dear Sir or Madame:

I am writing to dispute a fraudulent (charge or debit) on my account in the amount of \$_____, which happened on _____ (date). I am a victim of identity theft and did not make this transaction. I am requesting that the charge be removed (or debit be reinstated), and that any finance charge related to the fraudulent amount be credited as well. Please send me a corrected statement.

Enclosed are copies of _____ supporting my position. (such as police report etc.) Please investigate this matter and correct the fraudulent (charge/debit) as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

(signature)

Your name

Enclosure: (List what you are enclosing)