

FTC Consumer Alert

Federal Trade Commission ■ Bureau of Consumer Protection ■ Office of Consumer & Business Education

Bogus July 1 Email Exposed: The Real Deal on Your Credit File Privacy

Seems like every spring, an anonymous email containing false and misleading information about the use of your personal information shows up in in-boxes across the country, leaving many consumers concerned and confused. It's no wonder: The email message mixes apples and oranges.

Here's what the email says:

"Just wanted to let everyone know who hasn't already heard, the four major credit bureaus in the U.S. will be allowed, starting July 1, to release your credit info, mailing addresses, phone numbers... to anyone who requests it. If you would like to "opt out" of this release of info., you can call 1-888-567-8688. It only takes a couple of minutes to do."

And here's the real deal from the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the agency that enforces the Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA).

- July 1, 2001 was the deadline, under the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act (GLB), for financial institutions to let you know about their privacy policies and how you could opt out of some of their information-sharing practices (see *Privacy Choices for Your Personal Financial Information* at ftc.gov/credit). You may recall getting mailings or statement inserts from your financial institutions, creditors, insurance companies and brokerage firms about this. But the July 1 date is not – and never was – a deadline for consumers to do anything. In fact, consumers can contact their financial institutions anytime to opt out of information sharing practices under GLB.
- Credit bureaus can release your credit information only to people with a legitimate business need, as recognized by the FCRA. For example, a company is allowed to get your report if you apply for credit, insurance, employment, or to rent an apartment.
- You also can review a copy of your credit report to make sure it's accurate. The FCRA requires each of the nationwide consumer reporting companies – Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion – to provide you with a free copy of your credit report, at your request, once every 12 months. To order your free annual report from one or all national consumer reporting companies, visit www.annualcreditreport.com, call toll-free 877-322-8228, or complete the Annual Credit Report Request Form and mail it to: Annual Credit Report Request Service, P. O. Box 105281, Atlanta, GA 30348-5281. The form is at the back of this brochure; or you can print it from ftc.gov/credit. Do not contact the three nationwide consumer reporting compa-

nies individually. They provide free annual credit reports only through 877-322-8228, www.annualcreditreport.com, and Annual Credit Report Request Service, P. O. Box 105281, Atlanta, GA 30348-5281. For more information, see *Your Access to Free Credit Reports* at ftc.gov/credit.

- Lenders and insurers also may use information in your credit file as a basis for sending you unsolicited offers of credit or insurance. This practice is known as “prescreening.” You can opt out of these offers by calling, toll-free: 1-888-5-OPTOUT (1-888-567-8688) – the same number in the email that goes around every spring. The major credit bureaus use this number to let consumers choose not to receive these “prescreened” or unsolicited credit offers. When you call, you’ll be asked to provide certain personal information, including your home telephone number, name, Social Security number, and date of birth. The information you provide is confidential and will be used only to process your request to opt out.

For More Information

To learn more about your privacy rights under the FCRA and GLB, contact the FTC. The FTC works for the consumer to prevent fraudulent, deceptive, and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop, and avoid them. To file a complaint or to get free information on consumer issues, visit ftc.gov or call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357); TTY: 1-866-653-4261. The FTC enters Internet, telemarketing, identity theft, and other fraud-related complaints into Consumer Sentinel, a secure, online database available to hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.

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| 1-877-FTC-HELP | FOR THE CONSUMER |

May 2006

