

Protect your Identity: Shred it!



Identity theft is one of the fastest growing crimes in the United States. To prevent identity theft my office is launching a

public awareness campaign called “Shred It!”. We will be traveling across the state and giving consumers important information they need to know to protect themselves from identity theft.

Shred all documents that contain personal information, such as pre-approved credit offers, insurance forms and financial statements. The information in these documents could be used by an identity thief to open accounts and incur debts in your name.

It’s important that you review your bank and credit card statements carefully each month. Discovering identity theft within one month can drastically reduce your monetary loss and damage to your credit. If the identity theft goes undetected for six months or more, the losses can amount to thousands of dollars.

Warning signs of identity theft include unexplained credit card

charges or bank account withdrawals. You may stop receiving bills and other mail, or start receiving credit cards you did not apply for.

Another warning sign is that you may be contacted by a collection agency about a debt you do not owe, or you may be denied credit due to unauthorized debts.

If believe you are a victim of identity theft, contact the fraud department of any one of the three major credit bureaus and place a fraud alert on your credit file. A fraud alert requests creditors to contact you before opening any new accounts or making any changes to your existing accounts.

Once the first credit bureau confirms your fraud alert, the other two credit bureaus will be notified automatically to place fraud alerts on your credit file. All three credit bureaus will then send you a copy of your credit report, free of charge.

You should also close the accounts that you know or believe have been tampered with or opened fraudulently, and file a police report. Get a copy of the report to submit to your creditors.

You can also file a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). The FTC maintains a database

of identity theft cases.

Victims of ID crime often report that unauthorized activities in their accounts began soon after they responded to some kind of “special offer,” entered a contest, or set up an automatic draft on their accounts. Unsolicited special offers and contests should always be viewed with caution, especially when participation involves disclosure of personal and financial information. Be even more cautious if the offer involves an automatic draft.

Automatic drafts may be convenient for regular expenses paid to reputable and well known companies, but you should bear in mind that in a dispute with a company that can draft money from your account, usually the money will continue to be drafted while you attempt to resolve the dispute, and you may have a hard time getting it back. Allowing an unfamiliar company access to your bank account, especially when responding to an unsolicited offer, is asking for trouble.

While there is no sure way to prevent identity theft, you can minimize your risk by being cautious. People who have been victimized spend months and even years clearing their good names and credit records.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

Identity Theft

Major Credit Bureaus
Experian
P. O. Box 2104
Allen, TX 75013-3742
888-397-3742
www.experian.com

Equifax
P. O. Box 740241
Atlanta, GA 30374-3742
800-685-1111
www.equifax.com

Trans Union
P. O. Box 2000
Chester, PA 19022-2000
800-888-4213
www.tuc.com

For a free copy of your credit report:

Annual Credit Report Request Service
P. O. Box 105281
Atlanta, GA 30348-5281
877-322-8228
www.annualcreditreport.com

www.oag.state.tx.us



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