



# Department of Justice

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## **FACT SHEET: THE WORK OF THE PRESIDENT'S IDENTITY THEFT TASK FORCE**

Identity theft is a crime that victimizes people and businesses in every community from major cities to small towns, and robs victims of their individual freedoms. The President's Identity Theft Task Force, co-chaired by Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales and Federal Trade Commission Chairman Deborah Platt Majoras, has been working diligently since its inception in May 2006 to develop a comprehensive national strategy to combat identity theft. Beginning with today's interim recommendations, the Identity Theft Task Force will improve the ability of the government and the private sector to bring identity thieves to justice, to mitigate the risks of identity theft for individuals and companies, and to assist identity-theft victims in recovering from the effects of this pernicious crime.

### **Bringing Identity Thieves to Justice**

The 17 federal agencies and departments that comprise the Task Force each has a particular expertise in substantive areas that impact and can contribute to the federal government's response to the problem of identity theft. Of these, the FBI, the United States Secret Service (USSS), the United States Postal Inspection Service (USPIS), and the Social Security Administration Office of the Inspector General (SSA OIG) are all empowered to investigate identity theft, and the Department of Justice brings substantial numbers of prosecutions against identity thieves. The results of these efforts include:

- In fiscal year 2005, the Justice Department charged 226 defendants with aggravated identity theft.
- In fiscal year 2006 (through the end of July 2006), the Justice Department charged 432 defendants with aggravated identity theft.
- The FBI reports that it has 1,587 pending identity theft-related cases. It opened 662 identity theft-related cases in 2005, and has opened 272 identity theft-related cases to date in 2006.
- The USPIS reports that it opened 1,530 identity theft-related cases and made 2,277 arrests in Fiscal Year 2005, and opened 1,012 identity theft-related cases and made 1,294 arrests in Fiscal Year 2006 (through June 30, 2006).
- The SSA OIG Office of Investigations reports that it opened 1,566 cases involving SSN

misuse in Fiscal Year 2005, and 812 cases involving SSN misuse in the first half of Fiscal Year 2006.

Some recent examples of identity theft prosecutions by the Department of Justice include the following:

- *FEMA fraud.* On September 5, 2006, a defendant was sentenced to more than 10 years imprisonment for running a scheme to defraud the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), by using false identities to support his claims that he was a victim of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The defendant's scheme involved telephoning the FEMA emergency assistance hotline, providing a false name and address, and claiming to have suffered property damage as a result of the hurricanes.
- *Skimmers.* On June 19, 2006, federal authorities in the Central District of California arrested eight defendants accused of being part of an identity theft ring that "skimmed" account information from debit cards used by more than 100 diners at area restaurants and used the information to steal money from the victims' bank accounts. A ninth defendant was declared a fugitive.
- *Counterfeit Immigration Documents.* On February 13, 2006, a defendant was sentenced in the District of Colorado to 133 months in prison for aggravated identity theft, conspiracy to commit money laundering, and other crimes related to the manufacturing and distribution of counterfeit identity documents, including resident alien cards, social security cards, and various drivers licenses in Denver, Los Angeles, and Chicago.
- *Stolen Identifications to Open New Accounts.* On June 23, 2006, in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri, the leader and organizer of an identity theft ring and her two daughters were sentenced, respectively, to 70 months imprisonment; 2 years and 1 day imprisonment; and 4 years probation with home confinement on aggravated identity theft, identity theft and related fraud charges, in a scheme to use stolen identities to open credit accounts and purchase merchandise.
- *Counterfeit Checks.* On March 8, 2006, a defendant convicted after trial on counterfeiting and identity theft charges was sentenced to 132 months imprisonment and ordered to pay \$292,400.00 in restitution, as well as forfeit an automobile and various equipment, including computer equipment, which he used in the scheme. The government presented evidence during that trial that the defendant was the organizer of a conspiracy to manufacture, possess and utter counterfeit securities, specifically counterfeit \$100 VISA travelers' checks, counterfeit bank cashier's checks, and counterfeit U.S. Treasury checks.

### **Working Across Agencies to Disrupt Identity Theft**

Federal authorities lead or co-lead a total of 96 task forces and working groups devoted to identity theft. These include:

- *Federal Trade Commission*: The FTC provides support for criminal law enforcement through its Identity Theft Clearinghouse, the national repository of consumer complaint data. Law enforcers across the country use this secure online resource of more than 1 million complaints to identify trends and targets. This resource encourages greater coordination and data sharing among the more than 1,300 criminal enforcement agencies that have access to this system.
- *U.S. Attorneys' Offices*. U.S. Attorneys lead 17 identity-theft task forces and working groups, in cities such as Philadelphia, St. Louis, and Eugene, Oregon. Twenty-seven U.S. Attorneys' Offices participate in identity theft task forces or working groups.
- *FBI*. The FBI leads four identity theft task forces, and participates in 21 identity theft/financial crimes task forces or working groups in most of the major metropolitan areas. In addition, the FBI's Cyber Division has more than 90 task forces and more than 80 working groups, consisting of federal, state and local law enforcement personnel, which investigate all cybercrime violations, including identity theft and Internet fraud.
- *Secret Service*. The Secret Service has 27 Financial Crimes Task Forces and 24 Electronic Crimes Task Forces that focus on identity theft-related crimes.
- *Postal Inspection Service*: The Postal Inspection Service actively leads 13 Financial Crimes Task Forces/Working Groups in cities across the country.
- *ICE*: Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has established Document and Benefit Fraud Task Forces (DBFTFs) in 11 cities across the country to enhance interagency communication and improve each agency's effectiveness in fraud investigations.

### **Providing Essential Resources**

The Office of Justice Programs (OJP) at the Justice Department provides funding and training for victim service programs and victim service providers at the federal, state, local and tribal levels; funding for law enforcement's, prosecutors' and crime prevention experts' efforts to address identity theft; research and program evaluation concerning identity theft through the National Institute of Justice; and data collection for policymakers on identity theft.

Anyone wishing to ask a question about identity theft or to report identity theft may call 1-877-ID-THEFT, or visit <http://www.ftc.gov/idtheft>. Other resources are available on the Office for Victims of Crime identity-theft resource Web page at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/publications/infores/focuson2005/identitytheft/welcome.html>, and on the Department's identity-theft Web site at <http://www.usdoj.gov/criminal/fraud/idtheft.html>.

### **Improving the Federal Government's Ability to Fight Identity Theft Now**

The Task Force will present its final strategic plan to the President in November. In advance of that plan, the Task Force announced today interim recommendations to be implemented immediately to assist in the federal government's efforts to combat identity theft. These include

the formulation of a step-by-step guidance to federal agencies on the actions they should take should they suffer a data breach; the development of a uniform police report that can be used by identity theft victims; an amendment to the criminal restitution statutes that would allow identity theft victims to recover for the value of the time that they spend attempting to make themselves whole; and several “good government” measures that can be taken to reduce the amount of paper currently in circulation that contain Social Security Numbers, which can be an identity thief’s most valuable piece of consumer information.

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