

FINANCIAL PATHFINDERS, LLC

Travel Life's Journey with Peace of Mind

Comprehensive Fee-Only Financial Planning



Identity Theft

Identity theft is one of the fastest growing crimes in the United States. FBI figures show that 500,000 to 700,000 Americans become victims of identity theft each year. We ran across a web site that contains volumes of information on this topic. The site is <http://www.bos.frb.org/consumer/identity/index.htm>. This site is run by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston. It is available in both an English version (the site referenced above), and a Spanish version (<http://www.bos.frb.org/consumer/identity/spanish/index.htm>). From either of these sites, you can order an excellent brochure that describes how your identity can be stolen, how you can help prevent this theft, and what you can do if it does happen to you. To order this brochure (free for 1 copy), send an email to PublicComm.Affairs-Bos@bos.frb.org that includes your mailing address, or send a letter to:

Identity Theft Brochure
Public and Community Affairs Department
Federal Reserve Bank of Boston
P.O. Box 2076
Boston, MA 02106-2076

So, what is identity theft? It is a federal crime. It occurs when one person's identification (name, social security number, or any account number) is used or transferred by another person for unlawful purposes. When it does occur, most victims have no idea how it happened. Your information could have been discovered by a thief in a variety of ways.

- Someone may have stolen your purse or wallet, or you may have lost your purse or wallet. In case of loss or theft, you should notify credit card companies and banks immediately. This means you should have a list of your account numbers and the phone number for each account in a safe place. You should also not keep any passwords or pin numbers in your purse or wallet. You should not carry your Social Security card or your voter registration card with you. Remember when Tennessee automatically printed your Social Security number on your driver's license. Look at your license. If it still has your SSN on it, get a new license.
- Someone may have gone through your trash. This is called "dumpster diving". Buy a shredder and use it. If you discard credit card statements, shred them. If you get offers in the mail for new credit cards,

or some preprinted checks that you can use to get cash from your credit card, shred them before you throw them away. Shred anything that has your name and some type of account number on it. This includes utility bills, bank statements, notices from your mortgage company, statements from the Social Security Administration, etc. When you shop at a mall or large retail complex, make sure you take your charge receipts with you. Do not throw them out in a mall trash can. This is a prime target of dumpster divers.

- Someone may have gone through your mailbox. Try to get your mail as soon after it is delivered as possible.

How do you know if your identity has been stolen? Often, it is hard to know until something bad happens. Many times, a thief will open new accounts and use a different address. The thief will make minimum payments for a while, and then just disappear. In some extreme cases, the thief will perform criminal acts, and you will be charged. One excellent way to watch for signs of trouble is to request a copy of your credit report once a year. There are three major companies that report on credit, and you must request a report from each of them. They are Experian (888-397-3742), TransUnion (800-916-8800), and Equifax (800-685-1111). They will charge you for your report (about \$9 each), but there may be relief in the future. Efforts are underway to require these companies to provide one report a year at no charge. If you find accounts listed that you did not open, or if you find activity that you did not perform, call the credit company and get it straightened out. If you need help to understand your credit report, give us a call.

If you become a victim of identity theft, inform the three credit agencies listed earlier, inform the local police, and inform your creditors. Go to the web site www.consumer.gov/idtheft and obtain the ID Theft Affidavit. This can be used for reporting what happened, and will save you from having to fill out multiple forms for multiple companies. Make sure you get the brochure referenced above. It has much information on this issue. And, be sure you document any phone calls with any companies regarding your credit and the theft. Include the date, time, the name of the person with whom you spoke, and the topic of conversation.

As always, we at Financial Pathfinders are ready to be part of your team to help achieve peace of mind. Our goal is to help you create wealth, enjoy and preserve that wealth, and pass it on to your loved ones.

~~~We hope you have found this information useful~~~  
Information current as of May, 2004

