

Money for Life

July 2006

Dear Readers,

Companies or institutions that keep personal information about you have an obligation to safeguard it. However, the information they hold may be accidentally disclosed or deliberately stolen. If your information falls into the wrong hands, it may be misused to commit fraud against you.

If you get a notice that your personal information may have been compromised, taking certain steps quickly can minimize the potential for the theft of your identity.

This month's newsletter includes information from the Federal Trade Commission on your specific rights under the Fair Credit Reporting Act when you are, or believe that you are, the victim of identity theft.

Fraud Alert



You have the right to ask that nationwide consumer reporting agencies place a "fraud alert" in your file to let potential creditors and others know that you may be a victim of identity theft. Creditors must follow certain procedures to protect you. You may place a fraud alert in your file by calling just one of the three nationwide consumer reporting agencies. That agency will notify the other two which also must place fraud alerts in your file. Contact them at:

- Equifax: 1-800-525-6285
- Experian: 1-888-397-3742
- TransUnion: 1-800-680-7289

An initial fraud alert stays in your file for at least 90 days. An extended alert stays in your file for seven

years. To place either of these alerts, a consumer reporting agency will require you to provide appropriate proof of your identity, which may include your Social Security number. If you ask for an extended alert, you will have to provide an



identity theft report. An identity theft report includes a copy of a report you have filed with a federal, state, or local law enforcement agency, and additional information a consumer reporting agency may require you to submit. For more

detailed information about the identity theft report, visit www.consumer.gov/idtheft

File Disclosure

An initial fraud alert entitles you to a copy of all the information in your file at each of the three nationwide agencies, and an extended alert entitles you to two free file disclosures in a 12-month period following the placing of the alert. These additional disclosures may help you detect signs of fraud, for example, whether fraudulent accounts have been opened in your name or whether someone has reported a change in your address. Once a year, you also have the right to a free copy of the information in your file at any consumer reporting agency, if you believe it has inaccurate information due to fraud, such as identity theft. You also have the ability to obtain additional free file disclosures under other provisions of the FCRA. See www.ftc.gov/credit All consumers are entitled to one free credit report every 12 months from each nationwide credit bureau. To order reports, call toll free 1-877-322-8228 or request online at www.annualcreditreport.com

Information from Debt Collectors

If you ask, a debt collector must provide you with certain information about the debt you believe was incurred in your name by an identity thief—like the name of the creditor and the amount of the debt.

Documents Related to Fraud

You have the right to obtain documents relating to fraudulent transactions made or accounts opened using your personal information. A creditor or other business must give you copies of applications and other business records relating to transactions and accounts that resulted from the theft of your identity, if you ask for them in writing. A business may ask you for proof of your identity, a police report, and an affidavit before giving you the documents. It also may specify an address for you to send your request. Under certain circumstances, a business can refuse to provide you with these documents.

Blocking of Information



If you believe information in your file results from identity theft, you have the right to ask that a consumer reporting agency block that information from your file. An identity thief may run up bills in your name and not pay them. Information about the unpaid bills may appear on your consumer report. Should you decide to ask a consumer reporting agency to block the reporting of this information, you must identify the information to block, and provide the consumer reporting agency with proof

of your identity and a copy of your identity theft report. The consumer reporting agency can refuse or cancel your request for a block if, for example, you don't provide the necessary documentation, or where the block results from an error or a material misrepresentation of fact made by you. If the agency declines or rescinds the block, it must notify you. Once a debt resulting from identity theft has been blocked, a person or business with notice of the block may not sell, transfer, or place the debt for collection.

Reporting of Information

You also may prevent businesses from reporting information about you to consumer reporting agencies if you believe the information is a result of identity theft. To do so, you must send your request to the address specified by the business that reports the information to the consumer reporting agency. The business will expect you to identify what information you do not want reported and to provide an identity theft report.

Safeguarding Your Information

Ask about information security procedures in your workplace or at businesses, doctor's offices or other institutions that collect identifying information. Find out who has access to your personal information and verify that it is handled securely. Ask about the disposal procedures for those records as well. Find out if your information will be shared with anyone else. If so, ask how your information can be kept confidential.

Newsletter contact information:

Phyllis Zalenski
605 E. Main
Anamosa, IA 52205
319-462-2791
319-462-4572 (FAX)
zalenski@iastate.edu

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