

# Consumer Protection: Free Credit Reports

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A credit report contains information on where you live, how you pay your bills, and whether you've been sued, arrested, or filed for bankruptcy. Nationwide, three consumer reporting companies (Equifax, Experian, and Trans Union) sell the information in your report to creditors, insurers, employers, and other businesses that use it to evaluate your applications for credit, insurance, employment, or renting a home. Because your credit report can have a major impact on your well-being, it is wise to review it annually to make sure it contains only accurate information.

Recent passage of the Fair and Accurate Credit Transactions (FACT) Act entitle a consumer to receive one free copy per year of his/her credit report from each of the three national credit reporting agencies.

By September 1, 2005, all U.S. consumers will be eligible for free annual credit reports. The program phases in gradually beginning in December 2004. Residents of midwestern states, including Iowa, are eligible for free credit reports as of March 1, 2005.

## Request Your Report

The three nationwide credit reporting companies have established a central website, toll-free telephone number, and mailing address through which you can order your free annual report. Annual free reports are not available by contacting the three companies individually, but only through the central process:

**On-line:** [www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com)

**By phone:** 877-322-8228

**By mail:** Complete the Annual Credit Report Request Form and mail it to: Annual Credit Report Request Service, P.O. Box 105281, Atlanta, GA 30348-5281. Obtain the form from [www.ftc.gov/credit](http://www.ftc.gov/credit) or request it from your county Extension office.

You may order your reports from each of the three nationwide consumer reporting companies at the same time, or you can order from only one or two at a time. The law allows you to order one free copy from each of the nationwide consumer reporting companies every 12 months.

To request a credit report, you need to provide the following information:

- Name
- Address (current and past 2 years)
- Social Security number
- Date of birth

The credit reporting agency may also ask you for some information that only you would know, like the amount of your monthly mortgage payment.

## Avoid Fraudulent Inquiries

[www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com) is the only authorized source for your free annual credit report from the three nationwide consumer reporting companies. [www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com) and the nationwide consumer reporting companies will not call you or send an email asking for your personal information. If you get a phone call or an email, or see a pop-up ad claiming it's from [www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com) or any of the three nationwide consumer reporting companies, do not reply or click on any link in the message — it's probably a scam. Report such incidents to the Federal Trade Commission's database of deceptive spam at [www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov) or 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357)

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Adapted from [www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov),  
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