

# IDENTITY THEFT

## We're here to help you.

If someone has stolen your identity, you need to take immediate steps to guard your financial interests and protect your hard-earned credit. FORUM Credit Union has created this kit to help you understand what you need to do. Inside, you'll find a variety of helpful resources and suggested sources for more information. And don't forget that answers to your questions are as close as your nearby FORUM location.

### **Immediate Actions You Should Take**

- Contact FORUM and your other financial institutions to let us know, so we can protect your accounts.
- Call one of the three major credit reporting agencies (Equifax 800.525.6285, Experian 888.397.3742, or TransUnion 800.680.7289) and ask them to place a Fraud Alert on your credit reports.
- Contact all of your credit card companies and other credit issuers to make them aware, and ask them to send you new credit cards.
- Notify your local law enforcement agency so that they're aware (remember, identity theft is a crime).
- Contact the Federal Trade Commission at 1.877.IDTHEFT or at [www.consumer.gov/idtheft](http://www.consumer.gov/idtheft) to file a complaint and learn about others steps to take.

You'll find more detailed information inside this kit.

## How to report identity theft or fraud.

If you believe that you've been the victim of identity theft or similar fraud, you need to act immediately. Your first step is to verify that such a crime has taken place, and the easiest way to do that is to obtain a copy of your credit report. Americans are entitled to one free credit report a year (you can obtain yours through [www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com) or by calling 877.322.8228). Your report will show any accounts that have been opened under your name. If you see accounts that you have not opened, you are probably a victim of identity theft.

### **Call The Police**

Identity theft is a crime, and should be reported to your local law enforcement agency. Be sure to get copies of the police report, because you'll need it when dealing with some creditors (and possibly, the courts).

### **Get a Fraud Alert**

Because it can take weeks for fraudulent activity to show up on your credit report, tell the credit bureaus that you want to place a "fraud alert." Any financial institution or business that is opening an account under your name will be notified of the possible fraud, so they can verify your identity. The initial fraud alert lasts just 90 days, but you can (and should) request an extension for a full seven years if you have a police report.

### **Tell Your Creditors and Financial Institutions**

Contact FORUM and your other financial institutions to let us know, so we can protect your accounts. Also contact all of your credit card companies and other credit issuers to make them aware, and ask them to send you new credit cards. If a thief has opened accounts in your name, send a copy of the police report along with a request that they be closed immediately. If a debt collector tries to collect a fraudulent debt, explain that you are a victim of identity theft and ask what formal steps you'll need to take to clear your name.

### **Notify the Federal Trade Commission**

Contact the FTC at 1-877-IDTHEFT or at [www.consumer.gov/idtheft](http://www.consumer.gov/idtheft) to file a complaint and learn about other steps to take.

### **Contact the Postal Service**

If the identity thief filed a fraudulent change-of-address for your name or used the mail to commit fraud, tell your local Postmaster, and ask how you can contact the nearest Postal Inspector.

### **Keep Good Records of Everything**

Document all of your activities to report the theft, because creditors or others may later want to verify that you took all of the right steps.

# RECOVERING

## How to recover from identity theft.

Once you've taken all the steps to report that you've been a victim of identity theft, you can begin the process of recovering from this crime. Please understand that it will not be a fast or an easy process, but it is very important to take the right steps.

### **Legal Action**

If any creditors are not cooperating with your efforts to clear your name and credit, you may want to sit down with an attorney and discuss your options under the law. Your local Bar Association can refer you to an attorney who handles consumer law and credit issues.

### **Your Mental Health**

It's not unusual for victims of identity theft to undergo significant emotional stress and feelings of anger or depression. Please know that there is nothing unusual about being sad or angry — but if those feelings are beginning to interfere with your daily life or your relationships with others, you may want to consider receiving psychological counseling. Your local Mental Health Association can help you find the right counselor for your needs.

### **Don't Give Up**

It's easy to throw up your hands in frustration and pay a bill from a creditor that keeps threatening you, or to decide to file bankruptcy as a "solution." Don't do it! You didn't do anything wrong, and as long as you follow the proper steps, you should be able to restore your credit and your name. The law is on your side — and if an unscrupulous creditor tells you otherwise and threatens legal action against you, contact an attorney or government agency immediately.

### **Continue To Keep Good Records**

As you begin to restore your credit, continue to document all of your activities. You may be able to deduct some of the costs from the theft from your taxes.

# PREVENTING

## Ways to prevent identity theft.

### **Handle Financial Activities Online**

While many people believe that identity theft is a problem created by the Internet, it has actually been around for many years — and two of the prime sources thieves use to gain your personal financial information are the mail and your trash. In fact, one expert suggests that billions of dollars in identity theft could be prevented if more Americans handled both their financial activities and shopping online.

### **Simple Steps To Protect Yourself**

Stay in control of your financial information and protect it as if it were money. Save your receipts and compare them with billing statements. And shred those old statements and unsolicited credit card offers rather than throwing them in the trash. Finally, check your credit report annually by visiting [www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com) or by calling 877.322.8228.

### **Watch Out For Phishing**

Phishing is an online fraud in which criminals send fraudulent emails that appear to be legitimate requests from banks, credit card companies, and online services such as PayPal. Often, clicking on the emails brings the user to a legitimate-looking but fraudulent site that requests information such as account numbers. Once the criminals have those numbers, they can use them to steal from you. So don't respond to emails asking for that type of information, even if they appear to be legitimate. If you think you've received an email that may be real, call or visit the website of the company (without clicking through the email) to ask them if it's legitimate.

### **Stop Unsolicited Credit Card Offers**

If you'd rather not receive "preapproved" credit card offers that identity thieves can steal, you can opt out of mailings by calling 1.888.5OPTOUT (that's 1.888.567.8688). The credit reporting agencies will not allow companies that make preapproved offers to obtain your credit information — but if you apply for a loan or a credit card, the lender will still be able to access your rating information.

### **IdentitySecure**

FORUM offers members identity theft protection through a program called IdentitySecure. For a low monthly fee, this program will provide you with triple-bureau credit reports and scores, daily credit monitoring, identity fraud support, and more. Ask a FORUM Representative for additional information.

## Looking for some expert advice about identity theft?

Having someone steal and misuse your identity is frustrating and confusing. That's why it pays to see what experts have to say. We've identified some websites and publications that can help you get back on track to restoring your good name and credit.

### **Credit Bureaus**

Equifax — [www.equifax.com](http://www.equifax.com)  
Fraud reporting 888.766.0008

Experian — [www.experian.com](http://www.experian.com)  
Fraud reporting 888.397.3742

TransUnion — [www.transunion.com](http://www.transunion.com)  
Fraud reporting 800.680.7289

### **Helpful Websites**

Privacy Rights — [www.privacyrights.org/identity.htm](http://www.privacyrights.org/identity.htm)  
Information from a nonprofit consumer advocacy organization.

Privacy Rights — [www.privacyrights.org/fs/fs17a.htm](http://www.privacyrights.org/fs/fs17a.htm)  
Their thorough guide to what to do if you're a victim.

Identity Theft Resource Center — [www.idtheftcenter.org](http://www.idtheftcenter.org)  
Helpful information from a nonprofit, nationally respected organization.

Federal Bureau of Investigation — [www.ic3.gov](http://www.ic3.gov)  
The FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center.

Federal Trade Commission — [www.consumer.gov/idtheft/](http://www.consumer.gov/idtheft/)  
A wealth of valuable information at this government site.

U.S. Public Interest Research Group — [www.uspirg.org/financial-privacy-security/identity-theft-protection](http://www.uspirg.org/financial-privacy-security/identity-theft-protection)  
A lobbying group working to strengthen identity theft laws.

U.S. Dept. of Justice — [www.usdoj.gov/criminal/fraud/idtheft.html](http://www.usdoj.gov/criminal/fraud/idtheft.html)  
The Justice Department's clearinghouse for identity theft information.

### **Publications**

*From Victim to Victor: A Step-by-Step Guide for Ending the Nightmare of Identity Theft*, by Mari Frank, Esq.

*The Rational Guide to Preventing Identity Theft*, by Jerri Ledford

*Preventing Identity Theft For Dummies*, by Michael Arata

*Take Charge*, by the Federal Trade Commission (available at [www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/pubs/credit/idtheft.htm#Identity](http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/pubs/credit/idtheft.htm#Identity))