

IDENTITY THEFT PART 2

From Victim to Victor

If your identity has been stolen, the thief may access your existing accounts, and you will see direct signs, such as:

- Charges you didn't make
- Money moving out of a checking or savings account.

However, the thief is often more subtle, establishing credit under your identity and then using it. In this case you might see:

- Bills arriving from companies you do not know
- Collection agencies trying to collect on debts you did not incur
- Bank or credit card statements that suddenly stop being delivered
- You are denied credit for no apparent reason

If you are a victim of identity theft, you must act quickly and aggressively.

- Immediately report the crime to local police. Be as complete as possible, list all accounts. (Get the police report number and a copy of the report. This is needed to deal with the credit reporting agencies.)
- Close all credit cards (have accounts marked as "closed at consumer's request") and change passwords on all financial accounts.
- Notify the fraud units of the three credit reporting agencies:
 - Equifax (1-800-525-6285) www.equifax.com
 - Experian (1-888-397-3742) www.experian.com
 - TransUnion (1-800-680-7289) www.transunion.comHave these put a fraud alert (90 days) on your record. Renew it as needed. Be aware, however, there is no legal requirement for creditors to honor alerts.
- Mail copies of the police report to all three agencies cited above with a cover letter demanding a copy of your complete credit file. Notify all creditors with a bogus account listed in the file, demand they close the account, and demand copies of all fraudulent applications. You will need a police report for this.
- Report the crime to the Federal Trade Commission (1-877-ID THEFT), www.consumer.gov/idtheft. This also provides information on resolving problems and private/government agencies for further action.
- Notify utility companies to look for someone ordering services in your name. If it happens, cancel the accounts. Public Utility Commission may help.
- Keep records of all correspondence and phone calls with everyone. Include contact name, date, and any actions to be taken. Follow up all phone contacts with a letter and keep a copy.

Be aware that trying to fix identity theft problems is a complicated, long, often frustrating process, but it must be done. You will often face uncooperative financial, credit, and even law enforcement agencies.

However, there are organizations that can help. These are:

- Call for Action (www.callforaction.org). Locally, you can contact this organization at WTMJ-TV (414-967-5495)
- ITRC (www.idtheftcenter.org).

Both of these organizations have check lists and suggestions that can help you go through the process of reporting an identity theft.

Written By: Chuck Joseph- Racine TRIAD

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