



Identity Theft: “Deter. Detect. Defend.”

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Identity theft affects 10 million people in the United States every year. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has launched a campaign called “Deter. Detect. Defend.” to provide resources to combat identity theft. If you believe your identity may have been compromised, or if you want to find ways to protect yourself, the FTC’s ID theft site, <http://ftc.gov/bcp/edu/microsites/idtheft/index.html>, is a great starting point.

Deter

Although there is no way to be completely immune from identity thieves, the FTC recommends several steps you can take to discourage them:

- Protect your social security number.
- Shred documents containing personal information before discarding them.
- Never give out information over the phone or Internet unless you know who you are dealing with.

Even if a website or caller claims to represent a legitimate organization, err on the side of caution. Don’t be afraid to ask why the solicitor needs your information.

Detect

Even with the proper precautions, you are not impervious to identity theft. To help detect fraudulent activity, the FTC suggests that you:

- Request your credit report at annualcreditreport.com. Federal law gives you the right to a free credit report every year from the three national consumer reporting companies.
- Review your financial accounts regularly.
- Check credit card and other bank statements for charges you did not make.

You can also sign up with a credit monitoring service, which will alert you to any unusual activity on your credit report (e.g., opening a new account).

Equifax offers a free, renewable 90-day fraud alert that forces businesses to take extra measures to confirm the identity of anyone trying to take action on your credit. You can reach Equifax at 800.525.6285.

Defend

If you have already been affected by this terrible crime, do not despair. If you act quickly, you can fix any damage with minimal effort and expense. The FTC advises you to take the following measures:

- Call the three credit reporting companies and place a fraud alert on your credit report.
- Call the security or fraud department of companies holding your accounts to have them close any accounts that have been tampered with or opened fraudulently. Follow up in writing and include copies of supporting documents.
- File a police report.
- Contact the FTC at 877.438.4338. Your information will help law enforcement officials track down and stop ID thieves.

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