



## 4 Steps To Fight Back Against Identity Theft

You're going about your day when you receive a phone call from your credit card issuer. Several high-dollar purchases have been made with your credit card halfway across the country, and your issuer is checking to determine if it was, in fact, you who made the purchases. Needless to say, it wasn't. Your identity has been stolen, and you're left feeling violated and helpless.

Even though you might have taken the necessary steps to safeguard your personal data, such as shredding data-sensitive documents, monitoring financial statements and protecting your Social Security number, there's no way to completely eliminate the risk of identity theft. And as people increasingly use the Internet to pay bills, trade stocks and access their bank accounts, the risk of identity theft rises exponentially.

### Take action now!

After the initial shock of the news, you must take action to clear your name and wrestle back your identity. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has a four-step action plan you should implement as soon as you learn of fraudulent activity:

**1. File a fraud alert on your credit reports.** By alerting one of the three consumer reporting companies of the fraud, you'll make it more difficult for the thief to open new accounts in your name. The good news is that you have to contact only one of the companies, because the one you contact is required to notify the other two. Here are the names and phone numbers of the three consumer reporting companies:

- TransUnion: 800-680-7289
- Equifax: 888-766-0008
- Experian: 888-397-3742

After you file the fraud alert, you're entitled to request a free copy of your credit report from each of the three companies. Carefully review each report for any suspicious activity, including unfamiliar debt and accounts you didn't open. If you find fraudulent or inaccurate information, correct it and continue to monitor your credit history.

**2. Close accounts that have been tampered with or fraudulently opened.** If there are accounts you need to close, speak with a representative of the security or fraud department of the financial institution. Follow up the phone call by writing a letter to the credit card company or bank and include copies of supporting documents.

**3. File a complaint with the FTC.** If you choose to share your identity theft complaint with the FTC, you can help law enforcement officials across the country track fraudulent activity and, ultimately, catch perpetrators. To file your complaint, contact the FTC Identity Theft Hotline at 877-ID-THEFT (877-438-4338).

**4. Contact local law enforcement.** The benefits of alerting your local police department (or the police department of the city in which the identity theft happened) are twofold: You're providing law enforcement with details that can lead to the possible arrest of the fraudster, and doing so provides you with supporting documentation you can forward to any creditors that may need evidence of the crime.

### Identity theft happens

Nearly 10 million people fall victim to identity fraud each year, according to the FTC. If you discover that your identity has been stolen, you aren't alone, and you can take steps to fight back to clear your good credit record.