



Educate Yourself About Identity Theft!

Identity theft is a serious crime. People whose identities have been stolen spend a lot of time and money cleaning up the mess made of their good name and credit record. In the meantime, victims may lose job opportunities or even get arrested for crimes they didn't commit.

Dakotaland Federal Credit Union is committed to helping you avoid identity theft. The following is a 2 part series about Identity Theft. It includes research and information from Visa, Javelin Research, the Federal Trade Commission, the Better Business Bureau, and the Texas Attorney General's office.

A great deal of the recent media coverage of identity theft focuses on exotic new ways that people with bad intentions can steal your good name—mostly things that involve computers, cell phones or other wireless devices. Indeed, identity theft involving new technologies is an increasing problem.

However most identity theft doesn't involve cyberspace. Today, most identity thieves still rely on tried-and-true methods to get their hands on your paper records - real documents that can serve as the basis for their dirty work.

In the cases where the method of identity theft was known, 79% of information was obtained offline versus only 11% obtained online. Conventional methods such as lost or stolen wallets, misappropriation by family and friends, and theft of paper mail are among the most common ways thieves gain access to information.

Family members and relatives along with friends and neighbors make up half of all known identity thieves.

Additionally, the likelihood of higher losses is greatest for crimes using traditional sources. For example, the average loss from information stolen from emails sent by criminals posing as legitimate businesses ("phishing") is \$2,320, which pales in comparison to the average loss of \$15,607 taken by family and friends or the \$9,243 from the theft of paper mail.

What Do They Want?

Previously, criminals stole your wallet for your cash. Now they want your wallet to steal your good name. Thieves are usually looking for information about you, including your name, address, driver's license number, Social Security number, mother's maiden name, birth date, or financial information such as your bank account, credit card, or PIN number.

Where Do They Look?

A thief may go to a number of sources obtain personal information, such as:

- **Wallet or purse.** While you probably don't have a lot of cash, most of us have a great deal of personal information packed into this relatively small space. How many credit cards are you carrying? Do you have PINs jotted down? A health insurance card? Voter registration card? Driver's license, registration and auto insurance card? Is your Social Security number on anything?
- **Mailbox.** A bill from your credit card company, a statement from your share draft account, an unsolicited offer of a new, pre-approved credit card (complete with application) can be a treasure trove of information about you. Outgoing mail may include bills with personal checks (containing routing and checking account numbers).
- **Glove compartment.** If you left your car unlocked and someone got inside, how much personal information about you could they discover? Vehicle registrations, insurance cards, old bills, and credit card receipts are all "gold" to an identity thief.

- **Trash.** People tend to throw away all sorts of things—like unsolicited credit card applications, old bills, expired credit cards, unused checking account deposit slips and countless other papers. So, for the identity thief, a bit of “dumpster diving” can provide a rich harvest of personal information - information that can be used to become you.
- **You.** The easiest way for a thief to steal your identity is to ask you for it. Posing as representative from a bank, insurance company, doctor’s office or law enforcement official, the thief calls or sends an email asking for key pieces of personal information.

What Does The Thief Do With The Information?

Here’s just a short list of some of the things that identity thieves have done with the information and documents they’ve acquired:

- **Credit Card Fraud** - Approximately 54% of consumers reported a credit card account opened in their name or a “takeover” of their existing credit card account. Thieves use credit cards to go on a buying spree, purchasing major items like computers and other electronic devices that can be easily sold.
- **Communications Services** — Approximately 26% reported that the identity thief opened up telephone, cellular, or other utility service in their name.
- **Bank Fraud** - Approximately 16% reported that a checking or savings account had been opened in their name, and/or that fraudulent checks had been written.
- **Fraudulent Loans** - Approximately 11% reported that the identity thief obtained a loan, such as a car loan, in their name.

Other ways thieves can use your personal information:

- Open new credit card accounts, using your name, date of birth and Social Security number.
- Change the mailing address on your existing credit card account.
- File for bankruptcy under your name to avoid paying debts they’ve incurred, or to avoid eviction.
- Apply for a job under your name.
- Give your name to the police during an arrest. When they are released - and if they don’t show up for their court date - an arrest warrant could be issued in your name.