

## **Identity Theft: What is it?**

You see and hear more and more of identity theft on the news, around the office, or maybe it has happened to you. Identity theft occurs when an individual gets your personal information including social security number, and/or credit card number, and then does transactions to ruin your credit - potentially stealing thousands of your dollars.

Unfortunately, everyone is at risk. Most people don't realize how widespread identity theft has become — nor how personally vulnerable they are. 10 million Americans were victimized last year — 41% more than the year before.

There are many ways to prevent identity theft. Once consumers educate themselves on how to prevent and avoid scams, the less likely they are to be taken. Here are some key tips on how to avoid identity theft:

- Do not carry important documents such as your social security card, birth certificate or passport with you unless necessary.
- Keep credit card receipts, bank statements and other personal documents in a safe place or buy a shredder. Shred all documents with any important numbers, including pre-approved credit card documents and receipts.
- When selecting a PIN number, use a mix of letter and numbers. Stay away from numbers that are easy to get (i.e. birth date, last four digits of your Social Security Number or mothers maiden name). Do not write or leave pin numbers in your wallet.
- Keep a separate list of your credit card account numbers, with expiration dates and telephone numbers. In an emergency, you will be quickly able to notify the appropriate parties to stop any unauthorized transactions.
- Do not give any information over the phone to a vendor.
- Read over all statements and review all charges. Make sure that all charges have been made by you.
- Periodically obtain a credit report and review credit history. The three main credit bureaus are Equifax, Experian and Trans Union.

Following these simple tips can greatly reduce the risk of someone stealing your identity. Identity theft is a serious crime. People whose identities have been stolen spend months or years cleaning up the mess thieves have made of their good name and credit. Don't let it happen to you!

For more information on identity theft, please call member services, or visit the Federal Trade Commission website at <http://www.consumer.gov/idtheft/>.