

Identity theft is on the rise in America. Here are some steps to take if/when you discover someone has stolen your identity.



It can happen at any time

Both my wife and I have had our debit cards compromised in the past 12 months, which is weird because my wife takes extreme caution in [removing labels from mail, keeping specific information off the internet](#), and protects her card wherever she goes. Her debit card number was used (in the credit card function, meaning the PIN number was not used and the Zero Liability protection was in effect) at a gas station 50 miles from our house at 12:30am, in December, FOR DIESEL! This was not identity theft but think about the repercussions from just this one example.

Ways to discover identity theft

- Mail sent to your house with someone else's name on it
- Unusual transactions on your credit card or checking account
- Creditors calling to collect a debt you never owned
- Arrest warrant issued for a crime you didn't commit
- Incorrect account entries on your credit bureau report (usually these are stupid errors, but they could also be an indication of ID theft)

In a recent podcast episode I talked about ways to make it harder for your ID to be stolen. However, being diligent with each and every step I outlined can not guarantee that your ID will never be stolen.

- Every 53 seconds a laptop is stolen, many contain personal information
- It is estimated that fewer than 50% of credit card applications are actually verified before being issued
- Data is unclear on how many cases of identity theft go unreported due to embarrassment of the thief being a close relative and statistics show that trend is on the rise.

Identity theft is on the rise in America. According to the Gartner study on Identity Theft in 2006, the victim population was at 15 million people. That means **every 60 seconds about 28 ½ people became a new victim of Identity Theft**. Today's electronic "conveniences" have made it easier for thieves to capture electronic data and use it in nefarious ways.

I teach people to be prepared for unforeseen expenses with an emergency fund, we know before leaving the house that we should be prepared for long lines at the post office, why don't we anticipate the day our identity is stolen?

Action steps to take for the day your ID is stolen

- First thing is first, don't panic! There's no fire. Knowing that you will be on hold for 40 minutes before reaching a customer agent will help you keep your wits about you and deal with the situation with a clear head.
- Verify the phone number: In each case of our debit cards being compromised the banks contacted us. **Do** not take the caller's word for it! Ask for their name and number and tell them you will call back. Check your documents (or Google) for the number to make sure you aren't about to fall for a scam. At this point you should feel comfortable sharing your personal information with a stranger who's job it is to help you. Contact the fraud division of the company where the account/fraudulent activity occurred.
- Don't waste your time with a customer service hotline, ask to be transferred to someone who can help you with ID theft. Close the account(s). A bank that wants to keep you as a customer will probably recommend this before you suggest it. It's in their best interest to close the account before more money is stolen.
- Write down the data: Keep a log of all conversations, including dates, names, and phone numbers with people/companies you talk to. Identity Theft Research Center offers a form letter for free to help keep record the information and submit it to the financial institution where the account is held. (http://www.idtheftcenter.org/artman2/uploads/1/LF_100-1_-_Initial_Victim_Statement.pdf)
- Report the issue to the Police. Note: This is not what Sgt. Smith signed up for, he joined the force to protect and serve, not fill out paperwork for someone who had a car loan taken out in your name. Be patient with them but be steadfast, you have rights and will need this for the next step.
- Place a fraud alert on your credit bureaus. In most states a victim of ID theft can have their credit bureaus (reports) frozen at no cost. This will help prevent any further accounts from being opened (well, that is if the creditor takes the time to check). Here are the companies and addresses to contact:

[Equifax](#), P.O. Box 740241, Atlanta, GA 30374-0241, [888-766-0008](tel:888-766-0008)

[Experian](#), P.O. Box 9532, Allen, TX 75013, [888-397-3742](tel:888-397-3742)

[Trans Union](#), P.O. Box 6790, Fullerton, CA, 92834, [800-680-7289](tel:800-680-7289)

This list got long, a lot longer than I wanted it to be. However, more information can be found at the Federal Trade Commission's website.

Most of all, it is important to remember when someone uses your identity to falsify documents, avoid legal prosecution, obtain credit, or even subscribe to magazines - you are a

victim. **DO** NOT sign up for a credit monitoring program, they can't prevent **ID** theft any better than you can by simply putting a credit freeze on your bureau. What you **do** to make your identity harder to steal is important, but knowing what to **do** in case it does happen is priceless.