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**Identity Theft**

**By Beth Gabriel**

Identity Theft – the 10 Best Tips You Can Use Right Now!

We've all heard horror stories about fraud that's committed by someone stealing a name, address, Social Security number or credit card. Here are 10 suggestions you can take to help protect yourself.

1. The next time you order checks, have only your initials (instead of your first name) and last name put on them. If someone takes your checkbook, they won't know if you sign your checks with just your initials or your first name, but your bank will know how you sign your checks.
2. When you are writing checks to pay your credit card accounts, DO NOT put the complete account number on the "For" line. Instead, just put the last four numbers. The credit card company knows the rest of the number, and anyone who might be handling your check as it passes through all the check processing channels won't have access to it.
3. Put your work phone number on your checks instead of your home phone. If you have a PO Box, use that instead of your home address. If you don't have a PO Box, use your work address.
4. Never have your Social Security number or driver's license number printed on your checks. You can add it if it is necessary. But if you have it printed, anyone can get it.
5. Place the contents of your wallet on a photocopy machine. Do both sides of each license, credit card, etc. You will know what you had in your wallet and all of the account numbers and phone numbers to call and cancel. Keep the photocopy in a safe place. It's also a good idea to carry a photocopy of your passport when traveling abroad.
6. For couples or friends traveling together – each of you should carry a different, unique credit card. For example, one of you could carry a Visa card and one of you a Discover card. Don't both carry the same credit card! That way if one of you has their credit card stolen, you still have a valid credit card to use and aren't completely without funds while you are traveling.
7. Another tip for couples or friends traveling together – each of you should carry the other person's

## Identity Theft

photo copies of their credit cards and passport. If someone steals your wallet or purse, your traveling companion still has copies of all your information.

8. When you're reading email, don't click on any of the links listed in the email message. No matter how tempting the offer is! This is a way 'phishers' use to direct you to their website and capture your credit card and personal information.

9. We are told to cancel our credit cards immediately. But the key is having the toll free numbers and your card numbers handy so you know whom to call. Keep these numbers where you can find them separate from your credit cards.

10. File a police report immediately in the city where your credit cards, purse or wallet were stolen. This proves to credit providers you were diligent, and this is a first step toward an investigation.

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### **Fighting Identity Theft**

**By James H. Dimmitt**

Chances are good that you know someone who has been victimized by the fastest growing crime – identity theft. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) reported that there were 10 million cases of identity theft in 2002 alone. It's estimated that someone's identity is stolen every 79 seconds.

The bad news is with increasing amounts of personal information available to an experienced identity thief, it shows few signs of slowing down. The good news is that identity fraud is now a federal crime with stiff penalties for those who perpetrate these crimes.

Here are a few simple steps you can take now to minimize your risk:

1) Check your credit report annually, if not more often. Most victims of identity theft don't realize they've been victimized until 14 months after the crime. By then the damage is done and you will spend a significant amount of time and money trying to correct it.

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2) Keep your Social Security number private. Do not have it printed on your personal checks or drivers license. Do not share it with anyone, including merchants, unless they can provide a good reason for having it. Once someone has your Social Security number they have the key to unlocking your identity and using it fraudulently.

3) Shred offers for pre-approved credit cards that you receive by mail. Do the same with any receipts that contain account numbers or your Social Security number. Identity thieves are not afraid to go "dumpster diving" in order to obtain your personal information.

Identity theft has become the fastest growing crime because it is the most profitable crime. On average, the loss from identity theft is about \$18,000.00. Taking these precautions now can you save you from becoming another statistic in the fight against identity theft.

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James H. Dimmitt

James is editor of "TO YOUR CREDIT", a weekly free newsletter. Subscribe to the newsletter by visiting

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Fighting Identity Theft

\$25,000 FREE ID Theft Insurance

Minimize your Risk for Identity Theft

WILL THE REAL YOU PLEASE STAND UP? How To Prevent Identity Theft

How Identity Theft Can Happen To You

Scams Exposed

Secret Copy Writer

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Disaster Preparedness and Crime Protection Manual

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