

Consumer Corner

Tips On Protecting Yourself From Identity Theft

(NAPSA)—Identity theft and credit card fraud are serious, growing problems in America. The Federal Trade Commission recently reported that identity theft was number one on the top 10 list of consumer fraud complaints in 2001.

What is identity theft?

Identity theft is obtaining someone else's personal information, such as a driver's license or Social Security number, and pretending to be that person in order to commit financial or criminal fraud. Someone stealing a credit card receipt from the trash and using that information falsely can initiate this type of theft. However, a higher percentage of incidents are attributed to lost or stolen wallets and stolen mail.

How not to be a victim

Providian Financial, one of the largest credit card issuers in the U.S., takes an active role in working to educate consumers on how to avoid becoming a victim of identity theft and fraud.

Chris Lewis, vice president and chief privacy officer for Providian, explains, "Victims of identity theft often don't discover the crime until they are turned down for a loan or credit card because of debts accumulated in their name. There are several, simple, preventative measures that Providian encourages our cardholders to



Identity theft is a growing concern for consumers, yet it's possible to protect yourself.

take to protect themselves."

Tips to protect yourself:

Watch your mail: Scan the mail regularly for your credit card bills and call the credit card company if your bill is late. Confirm it hasn't been diverted to a different address without your knowledge. Make sure personal information is not visible through or on the outside of an envelope you're mailing.

Keep track of your credit cards: Carefully review your credit card statements for unauthorized use as soon as you receive them each month. Take your credit card receipts with you after a purchase, tear them up or shred them when you no longer

need them, and do not dispose of them in public trash containers.

Be wary of who's on the phone: If you do not initiate the call—be cautious when giving out personal information over the telephone. Be wary of callers who ask you to send them money.

Use caution when purchasing online: If you use your credit card to make purchases on the Internet, be sure that you are using a browser that encrypts personal information and that the Web site you are using initiates a secure session (SSL).

Review your credit report: You should request a copy and review your credit report at least once a year, to make sure no one has applied for credit in your name or is using one of your accounts. Request a copy from one of the three major credit reporting agencies: Experian (www.creditexpert.com), TransUnion (www.tuc.com) and Equifax (www.equifax.com).

Following these simple rules and using common sense can help keep your personal financial information safe and secure. Additionally, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), has organized a program to combat identity theft in the FTC's kNOw Fraud Campaign. For more information about identity theft, visit the Web site at www.consumer.gov/knowfraud.