

Protecting Your Money

Reducing The Chance Of Identity Theft

(NAPSA)—If you've been a victim of identity theft or know someone who has, you're not alone. According to the Federal Trade Commission, the crime has grown so rapidly that nearly every person in the United States has experienced it or personally

knows an identity theft victim.

There are several ways to categorize identity theft.



- Financial Identity Theft, which involves the criminal use

of personal information such as a Social Security number (SSN) to establish new credit lines in the victim's name.

- Criminal Identity Theft, which occurs when a thief gives the victim's personal information to law enforcement personnel instead of his or her own information.

Criminals use a variety of methods in stealing a person's identity. According to experts at the Chartered Property Casualty Underwriters (CPCU) Society, some of the most common methods used by identity thieves include the theft of a wallet or purse, shoulder surfing, postal theft, dumpster diving, accessing computer records and stealing a family member's information.

Here is a description of some of the methods most people would not be familiar with:

- **Shoulder Surfing**—This involves the thief looking over a person's shoulder. According to

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one security professional, someone may be standing alongside you, pretending to use the adjacent pay telephone, but what he or she is actually doing is watching you punch in your phone credit card number and PIN.

- **Dumpster Diving**—involves a criminal foraging through trash bins looking for unshredded credit card and loan applications, cancelled checks and documents containing SSNs.

- **Accessing Computer Records**—Personal identification information is increasingly accessible and marketed illegally through the Internet.

There are numerous steps you can take while at home to prevent yourself from becoming a victim of identity theft. First, personal information should be securely safeguarded. For example, an alleged representative of a bank may call a customer asking for certain information for "account verification purposes." If you, however, receive an unsolicited phone call from someone asking for financial information, this call is probably fraudulent.

The CPCU Society is a community of credentialed insurance professionals that promotes excellence through ethical behavior and continuing education. To find out more, visit www.cpcusociety.org.