

SmartGuard Newsletter

The Many Faces of Identity Theft

Scams often manage to stay one step ahead of consumers

Identity theft isn't just a pain in the wallet anymore. It can also ruin your credit, get you fired, land you in jail...even kill you. Dramatic? Yes. True? Yes again. As consumer awareness about the importance of privacy protection has increased in recent years, so has the sophistication of the methods criminals employ to obtain and misuse our personal information for their own benefit.

Here's a closer look at different types of identity theft currently being perpetrated—and how Privacy Solutions can keep you safe from even the wildest of thieves.

Financial Identity Theft

This is the most common—and well-known—form of identity theft. One way or another, a criminal gets a hold of your financial information such as credit card numbers, and starts charging away.

The “luckier” victims find out early on and resolve the problem quickly with the credit card company. But less fortunate identity theft victims remain unaware of the fraudulent activity for much longer, only to find out the criminal has opened new credit card and utility accounts, even leased a car or apartment in their name.

Criminal Identity Theft

Criminal identity theft is a true identity theft—basically, someone impersonating you—but with a twist. With this type of crime, the thief doesn't want your money, he wants your clean record and good name. And instead of landing himself in jail, he hopes your information will help get him out and put you in the slammer instead.

In this case, when the criminal gets pulled over, arrested, or investigated, he gives all of your data instead of his own. Then, when he gets out on bail, he simply skips the court date or doesn't show up to serve his sentence. All the while, fees and penalties are incurring in your name, and you'll never know it until law enforcement runs your plates and finds out there's a warrant out for your arrest. Or, you'll be denied a job, only to be told you failed the background check based on “your” criminal record.

Medical Identity Theft

Who would want your bunions, bad back, and family history of heart disease? Someone who doesn't have medical insurance and needs it badly for an operation, a chronic disorder that requires ongoing care, or maintenance drugs. That person might be desperate enough to steal your personal insurance information and use it to receive care under your name.

Recent pushes toward keeping medical records online have medical identity theft on the rise, and there are serious medical and financial issues that come along with it. First, you'll have to deal with the uncovered portions of often whopping hospital and doctor bills the thief has racked up in your name—not to mention the frightening medical implications that start to build as the incorrect medical information of the identity thief becomes attached to your files. This can make for improper diagnosis and treatment should you ever need emergency care and doctors make their decisions based not on your real medical history but the criminal's history instead.

Medical identity theft—it's really a killer.

Related Links

<http://health.usnews.com/articles/health/living-well-usn/2008/02/29/medical-identity-theft-turns-patients-into-victims.html>

http://www.bankrate.com/brm/news/insurance/20070105_medical_identity_theft_a1.asp

<http://www.privacyrights.org/fs/fs17g-CriminalTheft.htm>

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A service of Privacy Solutions.™ The power to protect your identity.

Protect Yourself

As always, it's a smart idea to get proactive by:

- Keeping Social Security numbers private. Do not carry cards in your wallet, and question whether schools, sports teams, and medical providers really require this information to enroll or participate.
- Shredding documents containing sensitive information. It's always better to shred papers containing private data than disposing of them in the garbage or recycling.
- Requesting credit reports annually. Though not all types of identity theft will show up on them, it's still a good idea to check reports and question any activity reporting a different address, birth date, or other incorrect personal information.
- Contacting Social Security. Run a check against your name and Social Security number each year to ensure there are no work history records that do not belong to you.
- Considering Privacy Solutions' Personal Protection package. Our Early Alert system monitors a wide variety of sources, both financial and non-financial, to identify potential fraud. This is key because 22% of identity theft victims report their identity was used in ways other than financial, such as commission of a crime or filing false tax returns.

So don't let the identity thieves outsmart you. Get proactive today.