

# Identity Theft and Credit-Card Fraud

*By Lawrence N. Legg, CPA*

Alert! The Internet revolution has brought with it challenges to your financial security. Credit and identity theft have become prevalent in this environment, and many federal, state and local law enforcement authorities have reported drastic increases in these types of economic crimes. It is generally advisable to check your credit with all the reporting agencies – Equifax, Experian and TransUnion – on an annual basis, or more frequently. Equifax offers a service called Credit Watch™. This service will notify you via e-mail of any changes to your credit file, as well as provide you with an identity-theft insurance policy that will pay for part of the costs you incur to re-establish your credit in the event of a crime.

The precursor to identity theft is a change of address. The perpetrator of this crime will commence the process by completing a change of address form with the United States Postal Service. Although the USPS has implemented several controls to help prevent this, they are not always effective. Another angle the identity thief will use is to steal your mail and apply for credit using a different address. One way to prevent this, of course, is to have a locking mail box.

Are you tired of junk mail and the regular “You have been Pre-Qualified” correspondence? The nation’s credit agencies, by law, can sell your credit score, name and address, as well as other private information, to financial institutions around the globe. This process makes it easier for the credit thief to perpetrate a crime and ruin your good credit. The Fair Credit Reporting Act allows you to be permanently excluded from all pre-approved credit offer mailing lists and removed from the database. In order to apply for this exclusion, contact Opt-Out at 1-888-567-8688.

If you believe you are a victim of identity theft, first contact your local law enforcement agency. Second, contact the Federal Trade Commission’s Identity Theft Division at 1-877-438-4338. And, finally, you should immediately make a fraud report with all three credit reporting agencies. Visit their websites or contact them at the following numbers:

Equifax	1-800-525-6285	<a href="http://www.Equifax.com">www.Equifax.com</a>
Experian	1-888-397-3742	<a href="http://www.freecreditreport.com">www.freecreditreport.com</a>
Trans Union	1-800-680-7289	<a href="http://www.transunion.com">www.transunion.com</a>

Should you need any further information, please contact our office for more details at 954-927-1654. We can assist you in designing and implementing data security policies and procedures that will help you prevent becoming a victim of identity theft.