

Protect your personal information

Identity theft is a serious crime. It happens when someone steals your personal information such as your social security number or credit card numbers and uses it without your permission. You may see mistakes or mystery charges on your bank, credit card, or other account statements. You may receive bills for products or services you never received. Protect your personal information, urges the Federal Trade Commission. Get detailed information online at www.ftc.gov/idtheft.

- **Keep your important papers secure.** Limit what you carry in your wallet or purse. Pick up new checks at the bank instead of having them mailed to your home. Take outgoing mail to a collection box or the post office. Don't leave it in your mailbox. Shred sensitive documents, receipts, credit card offers, insurance forms, checks, bank statements, and similar documents.
- **Secure your social security number.** Only give it out when necessary (and ask if you can use a different kind of identification).
- **Protect your computer and mobile devices.** Use anti-virus software. Don't open files or click on links sent by strangers. Remove the memory cards from mobile devices before recycling them.
- **Protect your data online.** Keep your passwords private. Don't over share on social networking sites. If you post too much information about yourself, an identity thief can use that information to answer challenging questions on your accounts (birthdays, mother's name, pet names, high school).

