



Identity Theft

This publication is intended to provide general information only and is not a substitute for legal advice.

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**Government
of Alberta ■**

When someone uses personal information such as your name, social insurance number (SIN), credit card number or other identifying information without your knowledge or permission, it is identity theft and it is a crime.

PROTECT YOUR INFORMATION AND YOUR IDENTITY

Identity theft is one of the fastest growing types of fraud, but there are ways to protect yourself.

Guard your personal information

To minimize your risk of becoming a victim of identity theft, manage your personal information wisely and cautiously.

- When someone asks for information, especially identification, ask why they need it and what they will use it for.
- Buy a shredder and use it. Shred anything with personal or financial information such as credit card receipts, copies of credit applications, insurance forms, cheques, financial statements and old income tax returns.
- Cut up expired and unused credit cards. The card may have expired, but the number could still be used.
- Carry only the identification and credit card(s) you will need that day. You rarely need to carry your birth certificate, SIN card or passport.
- Don't fill in forms for contests, rebates or draws that ask for more information than you are prepared to give.
- Lock your household mailbox if possible.
- If you are going to be away, arrange for a trusted neighbour to pick up your mail. You can also go to your local post office (with identification) and ask for Canada Post's hold mail service. There will be a charge for this service.
- Use complex passwords on your credit card, financial and other accounts rather than easily available information like your mother's maiden name, your birth date, parts of your phone number or a series of consecutive numbers.

- Don't leave personal information lying around at home, in your vehicle or at work.
- Find out how your employer ensures your personal information remains private, how they store and dispose of it and who can see it.
- Don't give personal information to anyone who phones or e-mails you unless you know who they are. Identity thieves may pose as representatives of financial institutions, Internet service providers or government agencies to get you to reveal identifying information.
- Don't put more than your name and address on your personal cheques.
- Make sure unused vehicle licence plates are not available for anyone else to use. You can return expired or unused Alberta plates to any registry agent.
- Destroy your old vehicle registration certificate when you get your new one.

Be Careful

Be careful what identification you provide, especially if it is one of the main identity documents – a birth certificate, driver's licence or social insurance number. These source documents can be used to produce other ID and gain access to more of your personal and financial information.

Keep your computer and its contents safe

Computers make day-to-day life easier, but they also make it easier for anyone, anywhere to steal your personal information. Personal and financial information such as credit card numbers, account numbers and tax information kept on your system could be accessed by an identity thief with the knowledge and tools to get into your computer's hard drive or e-mails.

To keep your online information safe:

- Use a password that is a combination of letters (upper and lower case), numbers and symbols and would be difficult to guess.
- Don't use an automatic log-in feature that saves your user name and password. While this may save time when you log in or enter a site, it's a gold mine for a hacker.
- Use a firewall program, especially if you have a high-speed Internet connection that connects your computer to the Internet 24 hours a day whether it is switched on or off. The firewall stops uninvited visitors from getting access to information stored on your computer.
- Add virus protection software and update it regularly. Viruses can instruct your computer to send information to other systems and you may not know it.
- Be careful what e-mail you open. E-mails from strangers could contain viruses or programs to hijack your computer.
- Don't send personal or confidential information over e-mail. E-mail messages aren't secure.
- Make sure deleted information has actually been deleted from your computer hard drive before you sell, recycle or dispose of your computer. Even though you've deleted files from folders, they may still be on the computer's hard drive where they may be easily retrieved. Use a wipe utility program to overwrite the entire hard drive to make the files unrecoverable.
- Shop and bank safely online. Before giving your credit card number or other financial information to a business, make sure the merchant has a secure transaction system.

KEY IDENTITY DOCUMENTS

Driver's licence

A driver's licence is the most universally accepted and trusted photo identification card issued by government. While its purpose is to show that you are allowed to drive, it is generally accepted as proof of identification, address, date of birth and residency. There is little risk to just providing a driver's licence number, however, the actual licence, if stolen, scanned, faked or obtained fraudulently serves as a crucial tool for committing crime.

To replace a lost, stolen or destroyed driver's licence visit an Alberta registry agent in person and bring sufficient documents to satisfy the registry agent of your identity. At least one of the documents should contain your picture. You may be asked to answer questions from your own motor vehicle history file in order to confirm your identity.

Birth certificate

A birth certificate is the primary document for all citizens born in Canada to indicate citizenship. It is required when applying for a driver's licence, passport, social insurance number as well as other provincial or federal programs. Unlike many ID documents, birth certificates don't have an expiry date. You shouldn't carry it in your wallet or purse. Keep it in a secure place such as a safety deposit box.

Individuals born in Alberta who need a replacement birth certificate must apply through a registry agent either in person or in writing. To find a registry agent near you, visit www.servicealberta.gov.ab.ca, check the yellow pages of your phone book under Licensing and Registry Services or call toll-free at 1-877-427-4088.

Social insurance number (SIN)

Social insurance numbers are used in a wide variety of databases as a primary identifier. Computer-savvy criminals can collect information about you by searching databases. Don't give your SIN to anyone who isn't authorized to collect the information.

Don't carry your SIN card in your wallet, purse or car. Keep it in a secure place like a safety deposit box.

To apply for a replacement SIN card, contact Social Development Canada at 1-800-206-7218 or visit www.sdc.gc.ca. You will be asked to prove your identity and status in Canada.

Permanent resident card

This card provides holders with secure proof of their permanent resident status when re-entering Canada on commercial carriers (i.e. plane, train, boat or bus).

To replace a lost or stolen Permanent Resident Card, contact Citizenship and Immigration Canada at 1-800-255-4541 or visit www.cic.gc.ca.

Certificate of Canadian citizenship

The Certificate of Canadian Citizenship verifies that the holder is a Canadian citizen. The certificate is an official document issued by the Government of Canada. It can be used as definitive proof of citizenship status when applying for a job, passport, etc. It also acts as identification, showing the holder's name, date of birth, height and sex, photograph and a signature.

To replace a lost or stolen citizenship certificate, contact Citizenship and Immigration Canada at 1-888-242-2100 or visit www.cic.gc.ca.

Passport

A Canadian passport is the only proof of Canadian citizenship and identity accepted in all countries. You should report the loss or theft of your passport as soon as it is noticed to the local police and to Passport Canada by calling 1-800-567-6868, visiting www.pptc.gc.ca or the nearest Canadian government office if you are outside Canada.

Before the document can be replaced, Canadian authorities will conduct an investigation into the circumstances surrounding the loss. A replacement passport (which may be valid for a limited period only) may be authorized provided strict requirements are met.

CONSUMER TIPSHEET

- Most Internet browsers indicate when you are using a secure Internet link. To check to see if a website is secure, look for a website address that starts with https: or an icon - often a lock or an unbroken key - at the bottom of the screen.
- Use a credit card rather than a debit card to make purchases. Set aside one credit card with a low limit for Internet buying.

BE VIGILANT

Paying attention to details can make a difference.

- Once a year, get a copy of your credit report from one of the two major credit reporting agencies. The report tells you what information a credit bureau has about your credit history, financial information, collection activity and who has asked for your information. By checking, you can spot debts that aren't yours and see who has been asking about you. Follow up if a lender or credit-card issuer has asked for a report and you haven't applied for credit or a card from them. Someone else may be using your name. If you discover incorrect information on your file, *Alberta's Fair Trading Act* gives you the right to have the information corrected.
- Know when your credit card, other financial statements and utility bills are due. If they don't arrive when they are supposed to, call the company – an identity thief may have changed the billing address.
- Pay attention to credit card expiry dates. If the replacement card hasn't arrived, call the credit card company. Someone may have taken the new card from the mail or changed the mailing address.
- Keep credit card, debit card and automatic banking machine receipts so you can match them to your statements.
- Be wary of mail, phone or Internet promotions that want your information. Identity thieves often use

bogus offers to persuade you to give them your personal information.

- Keep a list of the names, account numbers and expiration dates of your credit cards in a safe place. This will help you when alerting credit card companies about a lost or stolen card. In Alberta, you may be responsible for up to \$50 charged to a lost or stolen card.
- Memorize all passwords and personal identification numbers. Don't write them down.
- When you enter a personal identification number (PIN) or password, make sure no one is watching.

CORRECTING INFORMATION HELD AT A CREDIT REPORTING AGENCY

If you find information on your credit report that you disagree with, under *Alberta's Fair Trading Act* you have the right to protest.

Write a statement of 100 words or less to the agency explaining why you believe an item on the file is not accurate or complete. The agency must check the accuracy or completeness of the information and it must confirm, correct, add to or delete the information within 45 days. If the agency corrects, adds to or deletes information, it must tell you and advise everyone who received your report within the last six months. If you have lost money, suffered damages or have been inconvenienced because the agency or someone reporting information about you did not follow the rules, you may have the right to sue.

For more information on credit and personal reporting, visit www.servicealberta.ca or contact Service Alberta at 1-877-427-4088.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU THINK YOUR IDENTITY HAS BEEN STOLEN

If bills and credit card statements don't arrive when they should, financial account balances show withdrawals or transfers you didn't make or a creditor or collection agency contacts you about an account or credit card you haven't applied for, you may be a victim of identity theft.

If you think someone else is using your identity, there are things you can do:

- Identity theft is a crime and you should let your local police know as soon as possible if you think you have been a victim. You will need to file a police report.
- Take action immediately and keep a record of whom you've talked with and what was said.
- Keep copies of all correspondence.
- Download a copy of the Identity Theft Statement from Service Alberta website at www.servicealberta.ca and use it to notify financial institutions, credit card issuers and other companies that you have been a victim of identity theft.
- Call the major credit reporting agencies (Equifax Canada Inc. at 1-800-465-7166 and TransUnion of Canada Inc. at 1-866-525-0262). Both companies have procedures in place to deal with ID theft and will put a warning on your file. These companies can also help you obtain and review copies of your credit record and report any false or incorrect information.
- Contact Social Development Canada at 1-800-206-7218 or by visiting www.sdc.gc.ca if you believe someone is using your SIN or if your card has been lost or stolen.
- Contact PhoneBusters, a national anti-fraud call centre that gathers information on ID theft trends and patterns. The information also helps law enforcement agencies in possible investigations. PhoneBusters can be reached toll-free at 1-888-495-8501 or by visiting www.phonebusters.com
- If your credit card is lost or stolen, notify the credit card issuer as soon as you notice the card is missing. Get new accounts, cards and passwords. Under Alberta's *Fair Trading Act*, your maximum liability is \$50 if the credit card was used after it was reported lost or stolen. If the lost or stolen credit card is used at an automated banking machine that requires a personal information number (PIN), you may be liable for all losses, so be sure to keep your PIN private.

Identity theft is a crime and you should let your local police know as soon as possible if you think you have been a victim.

FOR MORE INFORMATION**Consumer Contact Centre**

In Edmonton: (780) 427-4088

Toll-free: 1-877-427-4088

www.servicealberta.ca

Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Alberta

Toll-free: 1-888-878-4044

www.oipc.ab.ca

Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada

Toll-free: 1-800-282-1376

www.privcom.gc.ca

Industry Canada Office of Consumer Affairs

Toll-free: 1-800-328-6189

www.strategis.ic.gc.ca

Social Development Canada

Toll-free: 1-800-206-7218

www.scd.gc.ca

Citizenship and Immigration Canada

Toll-free: 1-800-255-4541

www.cic.gc.ca

Passport Canada

Toll-free: 1-800-567-6868

www.pptc.gc.ca

Phonebusters

Toll-free: 1-888-495-8501

www.phonebusters.com

A current version of this and other consumer tipsheets are available at the Service Alberta website www.servicealberta.ca. Most public libraries have Internet access if you don't have access at home.