

New Study Finds Identity Fraud Reached New High in 2009, but You Can Minimize Your Risk

Safety Tips from ITAC, the Identity Theft Assistance Center

A new report shows identity theft reached unprecedented levels in 2009 due to a weak economy, but there was some good news for consumers.

The [Javelin Strategy & Research](#) 2010 Identity *Fraud Survey Report* shows the number of identity fraud victims in the U.S. increased 12 percent to 11.1 million adults in 2009, while the total annual fraud amount increased by 12.5 percent to \$54 billion.

The good news is it takes less time – and money – for victims to resolve the crime. Identity theft resolution times fell by 30% to 21 hours. And nearly half of victims filed police reports, resulting in double the reported arrests, triple the prosecutions, and double the percentage of convictions.

“There are things you can do to manage your risk of identity theft, and not let it manage you,” said Anne Wallace, president of [ITAC, the Identity Theft Assistance Center](#), which co-sponsored the report. Wallace offers up these tips:

- **Keep sensitive information from prying eyes.** Request electronic statements, use direct deposit, don't put checks in an unlocked mailbox. At home or at work, keep all personal and financial records in a locked storage device or behind a password. When someone requests your Social Security Number, ask if you can provide alternate information
- **Prevent online identity theft.** Install software against viruses and spyware and keep it updated along with your applications and operating system. Never respond to urgent requests for personal or account information or divulge your birth date, mother's maiden name or other identifying information online. Use unique, hard-to-guess passwords. Turn off Bluetooth and Wi-Fi when not in use.
- **Monitor accounts for suspicious activity.** Monitor bank and credit card accounts weekly, via online, mobile, ATM or touch-tone banking. Sign up for fraud alerts to be sent to your mobile phone or e-mail account. Request a free copy of your credit report each year at www.annualcreditreport.com or 877-322-8228. If you receive a notice that your private records were involved in a data breach, take advantage of any free protection services that are offered and place a fraud alert on your credit report.
- **Contact your financial services company at the first sign of fraud.** The Javelin research shows you can minimize the damage of identity theft by acting quickly to resolve it. Most financial services companies offer zero-liability protection for debit and credit cards.

