Identity theft affects millions of Americans each year. The U.S. Postal Inspection Service is the lead agency in investigating incidents of identity theft.

The U.S. Postal Inspection Service is the federal law enforcement branch of the U.S. Postal Service®, with primary jurisdiction in all matters infringing on the integrity of the U.S. Mail. The mission of the Postal Inspection Service is to protect the U.S. Postal Service, its employees, and its customers from criminal attack, and protect the nation’s mail system from criminal misuse. The Postal Inspection Service has a long, proud, and successful history of fighting the criminals who attack our nation’s postal system and those who misuse it to defraud, endanger, or otherwise threaten the American public.

What is identity theft?

Identity theft occurs when a criminal steals key pieces of information to gain access to a person’s financial accounts. This information could include a name, address, date of birth, Social Security number, or mother’s maiden name. Armed with this information, an identity thief may open new credit or financial accounts, buy cars, apply for loans or Social Security benefits, rent an apartment, or set up utility and phone service — in someone else’s name.

Information in this guide comes from the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the U.S. Secret Service, financial and retail industries, and other members of the Financial Industry Mail Security Initiative (FIMSI).
Add these tips to your “must do” list to protect your identity:

1. Deposit outgoing mail at a Post Office or a blue U.S. Postal Service collection box, or give it directly to your letter carrier.

2. Shred unwanted documents that contain personal information before discarding them.

3. Review your consumer credit reports annually.

4. Never give personal information over the phone or the Internet unless you initiated the contact.

Postal Inspectors also offer these tips for ID theft protection:

- Order your free credit report once a year from each credit bureau to check for accuracy and fraud use. You can order it online at annualcreditreport.com or by calling 1-877-322-8228.

- Report lost or stolen credit cards to the issuer immediately.

- Sign your new credit cards — before someone else does.

- Memorize your Social Security number and passwords; don’t carry them with you. Don’t use your date of birth as your password.

- Never leave receipts behind — at ATMs, on counters at financial institutions, or at gasoline pumps.

- Check expiration dates on credit cards and contact the issuer if you don’t get a replacement before they expire. The same goes for monthly financial statements and bills.

Identity theft is a criminal offense. It occurs when a person knowingly transfers or uses, without lawful authority, a means of identification of another person with the intent to commit or to aid or abet any unlawful activity that constitutes a violation of federal law or that constitutes a felony under any applicable state or local law.

— Identity Theft and Assumption Deterrence Act, 18 USC 1028(a)(7)
Match credit card receipts against monthly bills and check financial statements for accuracy.

**If you suspect your identity has been stolen, take action:**

- If the crime involved the U.S. Mail, report it online to the U.S. Postal Inspection Service at [https://www.uspis.gov](https://www.uspis.gov), or call 1-877-876-2455.

- If the crime involved counterfeit credit cards or computer hacking, report it to the U.S. Secret Service at [www.secretservice.gov](http://www.secretservice.gov).

- Check whether the major credit reporting agencies have accounts in your name that were opened without your consent. Ask them to place a “fraud alert” on your file.

- You may be advised to close some or all of your accounts. At the least, change your PIN codes and passwords immediately.

- Keep a record of the names and phone numbers of people with whom you discussed your case, and of all reports and supporting documents.

- Report ID theft online with the Federal Trade Commission at [www.identitytheft.gov](http://www.identitytheft.gov), or call its Identity Theft Hotline at 1-877-ID-THEFT. The FTC has counselors to help you resolve financial and other problems that can result from this crime.
Keep your personal information safe from online prowlers. Here’s how:

The Internet offers a convenient way to conduct business. To ensure you use it safely, never input your credit card or other financial account numbers at a Web site unless it offers a secure transaction. **A secure (or “encrypted”) transaction will have these two features:**

1. An icon of a lock appears in the bottom strip of the Web browser page.

   ![Secure Site Icon](https://www.uspis.gov)

2. The URL address for the Web page changes from “http” to “https” for the page at which you input the personal data.

   ![URL Change](https://digitalid.com/cgi-bin/Xquery)

Report credit card fraud to one of the major credit reporting agencies, either online or by phone. (You can report the incident to any of the three agencies, as they share a common database.)

   Equifax: 1-800-525-6285  
   [www.equifax.com](http://www.equifax.com)

   Experian: 1-888-397-3742  
   [www.experian.com](http://www.experian.com)

   TransUnion: 1-800-680-7289  
   [www.transunion.com](http://www.transunion.com)

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Everyone with a Social Security number is at risk of identity theft. Learn how to protect yourself.
Visit these Web sites for more information on ID theft:

U.S. Postal Inspection Service:
http://postalinspectors.uspis.gov

Federal Trade Commission:
www.consumer.gov/idtheft

U.S. Secret Service:
www.secretservice.gov

Department of Justice:
www.usdoj.gov/criminal/fraud/websites/idtheft.html

Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation:
www.fdic.gov/consumers

Web sites for credit card companies:

American Express:
www.americanexpress.com

Discover:
www.discover.com

MasterCard:
www.mastercard.us

Visa:
www.usa.visa.com
Other publications with information on ID theft:

**ID Theft: When Bad Things Happen to Your Good Name**
Federal Trade Commission
1-877-ID-Theft

**Identity Theft**
Federal Reserve Bank of Boston
1-800-409-1333

For more information about the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, call toll-free 1-877-876-2455, or visit our Web site at uspis.gov.