Identity Theft

The Orange County Sheriff’s Department Crime Prevention Specialists have dedicated January as Identity Theft Prevention and Awareness Month.

Below are a few safety tips for you to guard against this ever-growing crime.

- Protect your credit, explore Fraud Alert options available through the three major credit bureaus. Read your credit reports. You have a right to a free credit report every 12 months from each of the three nationwide credit reporting companies. Order all three reports at once, or order one report every four months. To order, go to annualcreditreport.com or call 1-877-322-8228.

- Know your billing cycle dates and review your bank, credit card, account statements, and the explanation of medical benefits from your health plan. If your statements have mistakes or don’t arrive in the mail, contact the business. Consider converting to electronic or paperless billing and statements. Ensure you follow established internet safety procedures.

- Consider replacing your mailbox with a locked mailbox. If your mailbox is unlocked, ensure you collect your mail promptly after the post man delivers your mail. Avoid leaving outgoing mail in any exterior mailbox over long weekends and/or holidays when the post office is closed. Preferably, drop off your outgoing mail at USPS mailboxes located inside the office.

- Cross shred all documents that contain personal, financial, and medical information before discarding them. This includes; debit & credit cards, health insurance statements, Federal and State tax forms, receipts or anything that contains your personal information. Even if it only contains the last 4 digits of your social security #-SHRED IT! Check your local city website for upcoming FREE Shredding Events

- Never disclose your social security number, credit card number, pin, or any bank account details over the phone, email, or text. Legitimate companies don’t ask for information this way. Contact the business at the numbers listed on your statement and verify your account information as needed.

- Remember to store your social security card in a safe place, not your wallet or purse.

- Don’t use the same password for more than one account. Memorize and create passwords that mix letters, numbers, and special characters. If you MUST store these, ensure you do so in a safe location (not your wallet or purse).
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Safety Tips (continued)

- If you shop or bank online, use websites that protect your financial information with encryption. An encrypted site has “https” at the beginning of the web address; “s” is for secure.

- Beware of credit card skimmers, keypad overlays, and pin size cameras. Although ATM and point of sale machines sometimes appear “normal”, at times these can be compromised. Check the machine prior to using it, tug on the card slot to ensure an overlay is not present. Look out for discolored parts, attached brochure holders or speakers, etc. At gas stations, pay inside and if you must use an outdoor gas pump, pay with your credit card instead of your debit card to avoid using your pin.

- Where available, use an indoor ATM machine. Avoid use of outdoor ATM machines especially those located in tourist areas. If you detect any alterations to an ATM or store point of sale machine, do not swipe your card. Instead inform the business owner or manager. Remember anywhere you use your debit card, always cover the keypad whenever entering your pin.

- Avoid becoming a target of portable skimmers that can clone your credit card. When you hand your credit card to pay for any service at a store, drive thru or inside restaurants, know where your credit card is and try to keep a visual on it at all times.

- If you use a public wireless network, don’t send information to any website that isn’t fully encrypted. Free Wifi is like an open window and anyone can access your data.

- On your personal devices, use anti-virus and anti-spyware software, and a firewall on your computer.

- Ensure your home wireless router is password protected and use “WPA2” (wireless protected access 2) network authentication (encryption), especially for online banking.

- Set your computer’s operating system, web browser, and security system to update automatically.

If you feel you have been a victim of Identity Theft
Please call:
Orange County Sheriff’s Dept.
Non Emergency # (949) 770-6011

Learn more on how you can protect and reduce the risk of identity theft at

ftc.gov/idtheft

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