

# Identity Theft

(NAPS)—The nation's top professional golfer, Tiger Woods, recently joined the ranks of a new club—the growing number of Americans who have become victims of identity theft. Using Mr. Woods' social security number to obtain credit card information, a thief was able to run up \$17,000 in charges before being caught, according to news reports.

Identity theft occurs when someone steals your personal information and uses it to establish credit, borrow money, charge items or even commit crimes in your name. This year some 700,000 consumers are likely to become victims of this federal crime. Here are some tips from the financial experts at America's Community Bankers on how to avoid becoming an ID theft victim and what to do should information highwaymen sting you.

## **Protect Your Identity:**

- Never respond to unsolicited requests for your social security number (SSN) or personal financial data.
- Shred credit card, ATM receipts and any pre-approved credit offers you have received, but don't plan to use.
- Check all credit card and bank statements for accuracy.
- Avoid easy to figure out access and personal ID (PIN) codes.
- Obtain a copy of your credit report yearly and check it for accuracy. Available from: Equifax: 800-685-1111, Experian: 888-397-3742, Trans Union: 800-888-4213.
- Use only secure sites when making online purchases. Secure pages begin with "https."
- Pay for online purchases by credit card to assure you get what you paid for and to limit your liability.
- Safeguard your SSN, and check Earnings and Benefit statements annually for fraudulent use by calling 800-772-1213. Report fraud at 800-269-0271.



**To protect your identity from theft, it's a good idea to destroy pre-approved credit offers, ATM and credit card receipts before throwing them out.**

## **Should You Become A Victim:**

- File a police report.
- Immediately notify your bank and all of those with whom you have financial relationships.
- Tag accounts closed due to fraud: "Closed at consumers request."
- Notify credit bureau fraud units. Equifax: 800-525-6285, Experian: 888-397-3742, Trans Union: 800-680-7289.
- Establish a password for telephone inquiries on credit card accounts.
- Place a fraud alert statement on your credit report.
- Request bi-monthly copies of your credit report until your case is resolved. Free to fraud victims.
- Report stolen checks to check verification companies. Check Rite: 800-766-2748, Chexsystems: 800-428-9623, Equifax: 800-437-5120, TeleCheck: 800-710-9898.
- Check post office for unauthorized change of address requests.
- Follow-up contacts with letters and keep copies of all correspondence.

## **Be Alert:**

Suspect ID theft if you're denied credit for no apparent reason or routine financial statements stop arriving in a timely manner.