

MANAGING YOUR MONEY



Preventing Costly Hassles

(NAPSA)—The best defense against payment card fraud is to prevent thieves from getting your card and account number in the first place. The following advice will help fortify your defenses when obtaining and using payment cards:

- If a new or reissued card does not arrive when expected, call your card issuer.

- When credit and debit cards arrive, immediately sign the back in permanent ink.

- Never leave credit cards, purses or wallets unattended, and avoid carrying Social Security cards, birth certificates and passports unless absolutely necessary.

- ATM and credit card receipts should also be treated as cash—never discard them in a public trash container.

- Do not write payment card account numbers on a check, or use cards for identification when paying by other means.

- Keep receipts and a list of all credit and bank accounts in a secure place. Include account numbers, expiration dates, and telephone numbers of customer service and fraud departments.

- Note when financial statements arrive each month and contact your bank immediately if they stop arriving.

- Check your statements frequently and carefully. If you find an unauthorized or questionable transaction, promptly call the appropriate organization.

- Obtain a copy of your credit report once a year from one of the three national credit bureaus. If the report is incorrect, immediately write the credit bureau and keep a copy of your letter.

- When making a purchase, keep your card in view at all times. Retrieve the card as soon as the transaction is complete and confirm that it is yours.

- Memorize passwords and PINs and avoid writing them down. Do not keep passwords in your wallet or with your card.

- Beware of shoulder surfers at ATMs and when using a pay phone, and cover the keypad when entering your PIN.



- Avoid speaking your account number aloud in a store or over the phone where others may hear.

- Never sign a blank receipt slip, and draw a line through any blank amount lines that appear above the total amount line.

- Do not provide your account number over the phone unless you are certain the call is legitimate and there is a sound reason for disclosing your account number. Never provide your account number by phone if you didn't initiate the call.

- Web sites without precisely worded privacy policies should be of concern. Try to confirm that the Internet merchant is reputable by checking with the Better Business Bureau or state and local consumer agencies to learn of any past complaints.

- Look for information explaining how the Web site protects financial information when it is transmitted and stored. Make sure the merchant that you are dealing with has proper security measures in place to protect the data you provide.

- Do not provide information that you are uncomfortable giving.

Credit and debit cards remain one of the safest ways to pay for goods and services in person, by phone and online. MasterCard standards protect most cardholders from responsibility for fraudulent purchases made on their accounts, however, caution and common sense are still the best defenses against payment card fraud.

Next month, look for the final part of our series on payment card fraud—"What To Do When Fraudsters Strike."