

Your Family Finances

What To Do When Fraudsters Strike

(NAPSA)—Credit and debit cards remain one of the safest ways to pay for goods and services in person, by phone, and online. However, caution and common sense are still the best defenses against payment card fraud.

Unfortunately, finding that you've been victimized can often take months or even years. People may not realize that they've been victims of identity theft until they try to buy a car or a house and they're denied credit. That is usually the first time they discover fraudulent activity. That's why it is so important to monitor your credit history by frequently requesting credit reports on yourself so you can look out for suspicious activity.

And acting quickly when you do find out you've been victimized can help shut down an identity thief and prevent further damage to your credit history.

If you believe you are the victim of payment card fraud, MasterCard recommends taking the following steps:

1. Report suspected fraudulent activity to your financial institution and the police. If you believe you are the victim of identity theft, call the Federal Trade Commission at 877-438-4338. If your Social Security number has been stolen, you should contact the Social Security Administration.

2. Diligently check payment card and bank statements in the following months to make sure the problem has been completely resolved.



By taking immediate action and following these guidelines, you can minimize the damage fraudsters can cause.

3. You may also want to contact the three national credit bureaus to let them know that you were a victim of fraud. You can ask that they place a "Fraud Alert" on your file, which lets banks and merchants know that there is suspected fraudulent activity on your account. You can request copies of your credit report, which you should review carefully, from any of the following credit bureaus.

- Equifax: Call (800)-525-6285 and write P.O. Box 740241, Atlanta, GA 30374-0241

- Experian: Call (888)-397-3742 and write P.O. Box 949, Allen TX 75013-0949

- TransUnion: Call (800)-680-7289 and write Fraud Victim Assistance Division, P.O. Box 6790, Fullerton, CA 92834