



**Identity theft is a crime. ID thieves steal your good name, bilk billions of dollars from the economy, and strain law enforcement resources.**

Identity theft and identity fraud are terms used to refer to all types of crime in which someone wrongfully obtains and uses another person's personal data in some way that involves fraud or deception, typically for economic gain. Unlike your fingerprints, which are unique to you and cannot be given to someone else for their use, your personal data, especially your Social Security number, your bank account or credit card number, your telephone calling card number, and other valuable identifying data can be used, if they fall into the wrong hands, to personally profit at your expense. In the United States and Canada, for example, many people have reported that unauthorized persons have taken funds out of their bank or financial accounts, or, in the worst cases, taken over their identities altogether, running up vast debts and committing crimes while using the victims' names. In many cases, a victim's losses may include not only out-of-pocket financial losses, but also substantial additional financial costs associated with trying to restore his or her reputation in the community and correcting erroneous information for which the criminal is responsible.

For information on how you can protect yourself from becoming a victim, or for steps you can take if you have already been victimized, check out these web sites –

<http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/microsites/idtheft/>

<http://www.identitytheft.gov/>

<http://www.usdoj.gov/criminal/fraud/websites/idtheft.html>