

Thoughts on Equifax: Be proactive, take precautions



If you're concerned about the Equifax data breach, you're in good company. Criminals broke into their database and stole names, Social Security numbers, birth dates, addresses and, even the drivers' licenses of 145 million people. Approximately 209,000 people had credit card numbers stolen.

These thieves can open new lines of credit, steal your tax refund, prevent you from filing your tax return by submitting a phony tax return, and use your info to get health care resulting in medial collections and false health information in your records.

If the thief gets arrested and uses your identity, you can end up with a criminal record. My scariest nightmare. Enough about 'what can happen' – let's figure out how to prevent a nightmare.

I visited www.equifaxsecurity2017.com/consumer-notice and was asked to put in the last six of my SS number. The screen showed that my 'personal information may have been impacted by this incident'.

Since I have credit, there is a high probability that thieves now have my Social Security number and personal information.

I immediately enrolled in the Equifax TrustedID Premier that provides credit monitoring, identity theft insurance, and searches on suspicious sites. This free (for one year) credit monitoring service will alert me when my personal information is being used or requested.

Previously, I was not a fan of these monitoring services; I've changed my mind. (I'm entitled.)

Under federal law, free copies of our credit reports are available (once a year) from the three credit reporting agencies: Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion at www.annualcreditreport.com. I plan to review my reports every 122 days by rotating the agencies and looking for suspicious activity.

We're not done. Monitor online statements because credit reports don't show money stolen from bank accounts or fraudulent credit card activity. Theft happens over time starting with small amounts stolen.

Free fraud alerts can be placed on accounts with any one of the agencies; they are required to notify the other two. Fraud alerts warn creditors of identity theft victims for 90 days (and can be renewed).

I'm still concerned and I don't plan on borrowing money anytime soon, so I put a freeze on my credit. This blocks anyone from accessing my credit report. I now have a unique personal identification number that can be used to 'thaw' my credit file when I'm ready to apply for a loan or line of credit.

ID thieves often intercept credit card offers; opt out of these by calling 1-888-5-OPT-OUT (1-888-567-8688) or visiting www.optoutprescreen.com

Don't put account numbers or social security numbers in texts or emails. Guard your Medicare card until you get your new one next year. Believe it or not, these cards use social security numbers as ID numbers.

Go online with the IRS and request an Identity Protection PIN (IP PIN) to

prevent the misuse of your Social Security number on fraudulent federal income tax returns.

As an alternative to Equifax, LifeLock is an Arizona-based identity theft protection company that offers similar protection.

You have options, but 'doing nothing' is not a good choice. Be proactive, thieves are. Fixing problems is time-consuming, costly and much more difficult than preventing them.

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