SPEAK OUT

April/May 2009

Identity Theft

Objectives

- To educate advisory council members about the dangers of identity theft.
- To provide information that could protect advisory council members from identity theft.
- To gain insight into how prevalent identity theft has been among advisory council members.

Overview

Identity theft occurs when someone uses your personally identifying information, such as your name, Social Security number, or credit card number, without your permission to commit fraud or other crimes. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) estimates that as many as 9 million Americans have their identities stolen each year. In fact, you or someone you know may have experienced some form of identity theft. The crime takes many forms: Identity thieves may rent an apartment, obtain a credit card, or establish a telephone account in your name. You may not find out about the theft until you review your credit report or a credit card statement and notice charges you didn't make—or until you're contacted by a debt collector.

Identity theft is serious. While some identity theft victims can resolve their problems quickly, others spend hundreds of dollars and many days repairing damage to their good name and credit record. Some consumers victimized by identity theft may lose out on job opportunities, or be denied loans for education, housing or cars because of negative information on their credit reports.

How does it happen?

Skilled identity thieves may use a variety of methods to get hold of your information, including:

1. **Dumpster Diving.** They rummage through trash looking for bills or other paper with your personal information on it.
2. **Skimming.** They steal credit/debit card numbers by using a special storage device when processing your card.
3. **Phishing.** They pretend to be financial institutions or companies and send spam or pop-up messages to get you to reveal your personal information.
4. **Changing Your Address.** They divert your billing statements to another location by completing a change of address form.
5. **Old-Fashioned Stealing**. They steal wallets and purses; mail, including bank and credit card statements; pre-approved credit offers; and new checks or tax information. They steal

personnel records, or bribe employees who have access.

6. **Pretexting.** They use false pretenses to obtain your personal information from financial institutions, telephone companies and other sources.

Credit card fraud:

- They may open new credit card accounts in your name. When they use the cards and don't pay the bills, the delinquent accounts appear on your credit report.
- They may change the billing address on your credit card so that you no longer receive bills, and then run up charges on your account. Because your bills are now sent to a different address, it may be some time before you realize there's a problem.

Phone or utilities fraud:

- They may open a new phone or wireless account in your name, or run up charges on your existing account.
- They may use your name to get utility services like electricity, heating or cable TV.

Bank/finance fraud:

- They may create counterfeit checks using your name or account number.
- They may open a bank account in your name and write bad checks.
- They may clone your ATM or debit card and make electronic withdrawals in your name, draining your accounts.
- They may take out a loan in your name.

Government documents fraud:

- They may get a driver's license or official ID card issued in your name but with their picture.
- They may use your name and Social Security number to get government benefits.
- They may file a fraudulent tax return using your information.

Other fraud:

- They may get a job using your Social Security number.
- They may rent a house or get medical services using your name.
- They may give your personal information to police during an arrest. If they don't show up for their court date, a warrant for arrest is issued in your name.

The best way to find out if you have been a victim of identity theft is to monitor your accounts and bank statements each month, and check your credit report on a regular basis. If you check your credit report regularly, you may be able to limit the damage caused by identity theft.

Unfortunately, many consumers learn that their identity has been stolen after some damage has been done. You may find out when bill collection agencies contact you for overdue debts you never incurred. You may find out when you apply for a mortgage or car loan and learn that problems with your credit history are holding up the loan. You may find out when you get something in the mail about an apartment you never rented, a house you never bought, or a job you never held.

If You Have Been Victimized

Filing a police report, checking your credit reports, notifying creditors and disputing any unauthorized transactions are some of the steps you must take immediately to restore your good name.

A police report that provides specific details of the identity theft is considered an Identity Theft Report, which entitles you to certain legal rights when it is provided to the three major credit reporting agencies or to companies where the thief misused your information. An Identity Theft Report can be used to permanently block fraudulent information that results from identity theft, such as accounts or addresses, from appearing on your credit report. It will also make sure these debts do not reappear on your credit reports. Identity Theft Reports can prevent a company from continuing to collect debts that result from identity theft, or selling them to others for collection. An Identity Theft Report is also needed to place an extended fraud alert on your credit report.

You may not need an Identity Theft Report if the thief made charges on an existing account and you have been able to work with the company to resolve the dispute. However, where an identity thief has opened new accounts in your name, or where fraudulent charges have been reported to the consumer reporting agencies, you should obtain an Identity Theft Report so that you can take advantage of the protections you are entitled to.

In order for a police report to entitle you to the legal rights mentioned above, it must contain specific details about the identity theft. You should file an Identity Theft Complaint with the FTC and bring your printed Identity Theft Complaint with you to the police station when you file your police report. The printed Identity Theft Complaint can be used to support your local police report to ensure that it includes the detail required.

A police report is also needed to get copies of the thief's application, as well as transaction information from companies that dealt with the thief. To get this information, you must submit a request in writing, accompanied by the police report, to the address specified by the company for this purpose.

It's difficult to predict how long the effects of identity theft may linger. That's because it depends on many factors including the type of theft, whether the thief sold or passed your information on to other thieves, whether the thief is caught, and problems related to correcting your credit report.

Victims of identity theft should monitor financial records for several months after they discover the crime. Victims should review their credit reports at least once every three months in the first year of the theft, and once a year thereafter. Stay alert for other signs of identity theft.

Don't delay in correcting your records and contacting all companies that opened fraudulent accounts. Make the initial contact by phone, even though you will normally need to follow up in writing. The longer the inaccurate information goes uncorrected, the longer it will take to resolve the problem.

Awareness is an effective weapon against many forms of identity theft. Be aware of how information is stolen and what you can do to protect yours, monitor your personal information to uncover any problems quickly, and know what to do when you suspect your identity has been stolen.

Armed with the knowledge of how to protect yourself and take action, you can make identity thieves' jobs much more difficult. You can also help fight identity theft by educating your friends, family, and members of your community. The FTC has prepared a collection of easy-to-use materials to enable anyone regardless of existing knowledge about identity theft to inform others about this serious crime.

Conclusion

Although identity theft can happen to anyone, older adults seem to be victimized the most. One of the simplest ways of protecting yourself is to shred all documents that contain personal information prior to disposal. Take the time to review your credit card and bank statements as soon as you receive them. Finally, get a free credit report annually to ensure that your identity hasn't been compromised. As individuals and companies move toward increased technology in our lives, it is important that we, as consumers, take appropriate measures to protect ourselves.

Questions:

1) What practices or safeguards have you implemented at home to protect your identity and/or your family's and farm's financial records?
2) Are there additional security practices or safeguards you plan to implement?
3) What additional steps, if any, should our government or corporations take to protect consumers' data from identity theft?

June Topic: Creating Animal Agriculture Activists

Information Sources:

The Federal Trade Commission Web site
http://www.ftc.gov

CONNECTIONS

COMPARE YOUR RESPONSES

The following is a tabulation of the responses to the January Speakout Guide on the issue of the *Financial Crisis*. Samplings of some of the comments received are also included.

1. **Are you seeing the effects of the credit crisis and the larger financial crisis in your own community?**

- Foreclosures continue to climb and a lot of houses have been on the market for extraordinary long times.
- Factories are asking employees to voluntarily take time off.
- We are seeing more people at church who are losing their jobs.
- Large equipment and livestock are not selling as well.
- A local factory is working one week and then off for three weeks.
- The media seems to make things worse than they really are today.
- Levies are not passing in our area communities.
- Restaurants are still busy on the weekends.

2. **How are you seeing agriculture affected?**

- Import costs are up, more documents needed to borrow money.
- Ethanol plants are closing because corn went too high.
- Farm prices are going down and expenses are going up.
- Commodities have crashed, seed prices have gone up, fertilizer has gone up and cow slaughters (cull cows) are up.
- Farmers and bankers are reluctant to enter into loans at early dates.
- Operating loans will be harder to get.
- Agriculture learned a valuable lesson in the 80s and is better positioned this time around to weather the storm.

3. **What additional steps should our government take if any?**

- Don’t do anything: the strong will survive.
- Quit giving money to banks and car companies, give money to individuals instead.
- A real energy policy, no matter what the cost.
- The government should back off – the financial crisis will last longer if the government keeps its fingers in it.
- Our council feels that the government put us in this situation by forcing the concept that everyone should own a home – not everyone has the means.
- Deregulation has allowed this to happen.
- More control over the banks, create jobs to help our infrastructure.

- Many say we don't need more government in our lives, but we are reaping the results of deregulation.
- Government is already involved way too much.
- Quit patching things, let it collapse – feel the pain and let's rebuild.

PUBLIC POLICY

In the coming weeks, Ohio Farm Bureau's public policy team will be urging Ohio lawmakers to restore funds to the OARDC and OSU Extension line items in the state biennial budget. These programs, which are included in the budget proposal for the Ohio Board of Regents, faced proposed cuts of 24 percent (OSU Extension) and 15% percent (OARDC).

In realization that Ohio lawmakers are facing the toughest budget in memory, there are hard decisions being made across the board. However, these two programs are vital to agriculture in our state. OSU Extension connects people in all stages of life – from young children to older adults. It delivers targeted, relevant, research-based information and programming to meet the needs of Ohio. Likewise, OARDC is the intersection for superior, diverse and unbiased research. Additionally, OARDC generates significant economic impact for the state.

COMMUNICATIONS

Find out what Ohio Farm Bureau has been doing on behalf of the equine industry by visiting our booth at Equine Affaire, April 2 to 5 at the Ohio Expo Center.

ORGANIZATION

Look here for future news and information about Ohio Farm Bureau's Organization programs and activities.

HONEYBAKED WINNER

Buckeye 60 Advisory Council
Medina County

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Discussion Leader's Notes
April/May 2009

TIPS FOR LEADING THIS MONTH'S DISCUSSION

- Watch for newspaper stories regarding identity theft prior to your council meeting. Clip the stories and share with council members.

- Identity theft can happen to anyone, even individuals who do not use the computer or credit cards. Encourage council members to share how they protect their identity.

- Nationwide Insurance offers an identity theft insurance product. Consider inviting a local Nationwide agent to your meeting to share information regarding their identity theft product(s).

CONNECTIONS

Communications
OFBF and the equine industry!

Public Policy
Restore funding to OARDC and OSU Extension in the state budget

HONEYBAKED HAM WINNER

Buckeye 60 Advisory Council
Medina County

FUN SHEET

SUBMITTED BY: YEA-NEY ADVISORY COUNCIL
PREBLE COUNTY

Quotes from TV and Radio

Clue	Answers
1. Is that your final answer?	1. Who wants to be a millionaire?
2. I want to buy a vowel	2. Wheel of Fortune
3. Nan-nu, Nan-nu	3. Mork and Mindy
4. Say the secret word	4. Groucho Marx
5. One of these days, POW – right in the kisser	5. The Honeymooners - Jackie Gleason
6. Golly-ee	6. Gomer Pyle
7. Deal or no deal	7. Deal or no deal
8. Hi Ho Silver Away	8. Lone Ranger
9. The devil made me do it	9. Flip Wilson - Geraldine
10. Faster than a speeding bullet	10. Superman
11. The tribe has spoken	11. Survivor
12. Here's Johnny	12. Tonight Show
13. May the good Lord take a liking to you	13. Red Skeleton
14. We have a really big show	14. Ed Sullivan
15. This tape will self destruct in 60 seconds	15. Mission Impossible