

FCS News for Wed., Sept. 27th 2017

Equifax Security Breach: Steps to Protect Yourself

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Equifax, a national credit reporting agency that collects personal data on consumers, had a security breach that lasted from mid-May through July 2017. If you have a credit report there's a good chance that you're one of the 143 million American consumers whose sensitive personal information was exposed in this data breach at Equifax. The hackers accessed people's names, Social Security numbers, birth dates, addresses and, in some instances, driver's license numbers.

There are steps to take to help protect your information from being misused. Visit Equifax's website, www.equifaxsecurity2017.com. Find out if your information was exposed. Click on the "Potential Impact" tab and enter your last name and the last six digits of your Social Security number. Your Social Security number is sensitive information, so make sure you're on a secure computer and an encrypted network connection any time you enter it. The site will tell you if you've been affected by this breach.

Here are some other steps to take to help protect yourself after a data breach:

Check your credit reports from Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion — for free — by visiting annualcreditreport.com. This is the federally authorized website to check your credit reports, not your score. This will provide a detailed history that may better alert you to credit fraud.

- Accounts or activity that you don't recognize could indicate identity theft. Visit IdentityTheft.gov to find out what to do. Everyone can get **one free credit report** from each of these reporting agencies **per year**. They recommend you alternate these and get one every 4 months throughout the year to monitor your report carefully and it will not cost you.

Consider placing a credit freeze on your files. A credit freeze makes it harder for someone to open a new account in your name. Keep in mind that a credit freeze won't prevent a thief from making charges to your existing accounts. A credit security freeze will prohibit the credit reporting agencies from releasing your information unless you lift the freeze. In you live in Kansas, it costs \$5 to place a freeze with two of the agencies and nothing for Innovis. Currently, Equifax is waiving fees. If you want to open new accounts, you will need to lift the freeze. The companies are allowed to charge up to \$10 and can take up to 3 business days to lift the freeze.

The credit freeze must be requested from all 4 credit reporting agencies – Equifax, TransUnion, Experian and Innovis. Here are the web sites to request a freeze:

Equifax <https://www.freeze.equifax.com>

TransUnion <https://freeze.transunion.com/>

Experian <https://www.experian.com/freeze/center.html>

Innovis: <https://www.innovis.com/personal/securityFreeze>

To do by Telephone:

Equifax: 800-685-1111

Experian: 888-397-3742

TransUnion: 888-909-8872

Innovis: 800-540-2505

Be patient & persistent, many consumers are taking these steps. So the web sites or phone lines often get temporarily overloaded, even in the early morning hours.

- **Monitor your existing credit card and bank accounts closely** for charges you don't recognize.
- If you decide against a credit freeze, **consider placing a fraud alert on your files.** A fraud alert warns creditors that you may be an identity theft victim and that they should verify that anyone seeking credit in your name really is you.
- **File your taxes early** — as soon as you have the tax information you need, before a scammer can. Tax identity theft happens when someone uses your Social Security number to get a tax refund or a job. Respond right away to letters from the IRS.

Existing protections:

- If your credit card account number is stolen federal law states that you cannot be held liable for the fraudulent charges. If the physical card is stolen you can be held liable for at most \$50.00. Obviously, you need to report the fraud.
- Federal law does not offer the same blanket coverage for debit cards. However, private institutions offer this protection at no charge. The downside with debit cards is having money fraudulently removed from your account can cause problems with non-fraudulent transactions.

To find out more:

Visit <https://www.identitytheft.gov/Info-Lost-or-Stolen> to read more about protecting yourself after a data breach.

Federal Trade Commission, steps to take to protect your information

<https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/blog/2017/09/equifax-data-breach-what-do>

For further information on this or other consumer issues, please contact Diane Burnett @ 913-294-4306 or write to dburnett@ksu.edu