

An Ounce of Prevention

In looking to save money, an ounce of prevention is usually worth a pound of cure. And in no circumstance is that truer than in one of identity theft. Time and effort spent now will save you money later, should identity theft happen (and it could) to you.

Here's what you should do up front, before anything happens, to prevent having to spend thousands of dollars (estimated at \$16,000, including legal fees and time off from work) to clean up the mess left behind by identity theft:

- Don't give out personal information on the phone, through the mail, or on the Internet unless you've initiated the contact or are sure you know who you're dealing with.
- Deposit your outgoing mail in post office collection boxes or at your local post office, rather than in an unsecured mailbox.
- Remove mail from your mailbox promptly.
- Don't carry your Social Security card with you; leave it in a secure place.
- Give your SSN only when absolutely necessary, and ask to use other types of identifiers.
- Carry only the identification information and the credit and debit cards that you actually need.
- Be cautious when responding to promotions. Identity thieves may create promotional offers just to get you to give them your personal information.
- Keep your purse or wallet in a safe place at work.

Does protecting yourself take more time and effort? Sure. But if you've stopped an identity thief in his or her tracks, you'll have saved yourself much more time, money and effort later.