

Protect your identity during tax season

Many Americans have begun to file their 2012 tax returns. However, in thousands of cases, Social Security numbers have been stolen to fraudulently file taxes and steal the refunds. The victims of tax identity theft won't know a crime has been committed until they go to file and the IRS informs them that taxes have already been filed under their Social Security numbers.

Tax identity theft is more than an ongoing problem – it's an exponentially growing crisis. In 2012 more than 641,990 incidents of tax identity theft were reported through September, according to a CNBC report. That's up from 242,142 incidents in 2011 and just 47,730 in 2008.

With tax season underway, we encourage people to heed these simple tips from IDentity Theft 911[®] to prevent tax fraud from happening to your family.

1. **Keep it safe.** Never carry your Social Security card or number in a purse or wallet. Leave it at home in a secure place or in a safe-deposit box.
2. **Employ strong usernames and passwords.** Keep sensitive tax information (worksheets, W-2s, 1099s, 1040s) on a password-protected or encrypted external drive or disk, and store it in a secure location, such as a safe-deposit box or a locked safe. If you store it on your computer, make sure the drive is encrypted. Never store tax files or any personal information on a cloud or Internet drive. When choosing passwords, always include numbers, upper- and lowercase characters, and symbols such as *, ! and &.
3. **Snoop around.** Carefully choose a tax preparer. Many fraud rings front as tax preparation companies that may steal personal information. Verify the status of your preparer's license with the Better Business Bureau and IRS Office of Professional Responsibility (OPR). Email the IRS at opr@irs.gov with the full name of the individual or company and their address to confirm they're a legitimate operation.
4. **Do the math.** Your annual Social Security Statement will identify all income from individuals working in the United States under your SSN. Do the numbers look right? This can be a good way to spot otherwise undetected identity theft.
5. **Monitor your mail.** Monitor your mailbox and stay on the lookout for W-2s, 1099s and other official tax forms. If any are late or appear to have been opened, contact the provider immediately to find out how and when they were mailed.
6. **Splurge on the extras.** If you file a return by mail, make sure to use certified mail from the U.S. Postal Service so you can confirm its arrival.
7. **Go electronic.** Opt for direct deposit of tax refunds to avoid lost or stolen refund checks.

For more tips, please visit www.gmrc-idtheft.com, which contains current information about the latest scams, links to online resources and other interesting research and information.

About Grinnell Mutual

In business since 1909, Grinnell Mutual Reinsurance Company provides reinsurance for mutual insurance companies and property and casualty insurance products through nearly 1,600 independent agents in 12 Midwestern states. Grinnell Mutual is one of the largest primary reinsurers of farm mutual companies in North America.

About IDentity Theft 911

Founded in 2003, IDentity Theft 911 is the nation's premier consultative provider of identity and data risk management, resolution and education services. The company serves 17.5 million households across the country and provides fraud solutions for a range of organizations, including Fortune 500 companies, the country's largest insurance companies, corporate benefit providers, banks and credit unions and membership organizations. Since 2005, the company has helped more than 600,000 businesses manage data breaches. For more information, please visit www.idt911.com.

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