

# Identity Theft

A new buzzword, but not a new problem

**Hyatt Legal Plans**

A MetLife Company



Identity theft has gained increased media attention over the past few years, and the latest studies suggest that 8.1 million Americans are victims of identity theft annually.<sup>1</sup> Although it is a topic of growing national concern, there are steps you can take to prevent becoming a victim.

## What is Identity Theft?

Identity thieves may use your personal information to open unauthorized credit cards or loans, establish phone or other utility service, open bank accounts, create counterfeit checks or obtain employment. Financial loss and credit damage are the most devastating effects of identity theft. In 2007, out-of-pocket expenses incurred by consumers due to identity fraud averaged \$691, an increase of 25% over 2006.<sup>2</sup>

## Preventive Measures

Awareness and prevention are the best ways to avoid the consequences of identity theft. To prevent credit card theft, you should routinely monitor your bills, ensure your credit cards are not out of your sight too long (for example, at a restaurant or department store), and report the theft of a card, or receipt of an inappropriate bill, as soon as possible. Other ways to protect yourself include safeguarding your personal information. For example:

- Create passwords for your credit, bank and phone accounts.
- When creating your password do not use the obvious, such as your address, birth date, Social Security Number, or a portion of your first, middle or last name. Change your passwords every 90 days.
- When providing personal information over the phone, including your Social Security Number, credit card numbers or address, ensure you are communicating with a reputable and trusted source and ask how it will be used.
- Limit the number of credit cards you carry.
- Leave your Social Security card in a safe place at home.
- After paying your bills, shred them so “dumpster divers” cannot use your account numbers.
- Follow up with creditors if your bills do not arrive on time.
- Regularly check your credit report for unauthorized activity. New legislation permits consumers to obtain one free credit report per year from each of the three major credit bureaus. Visit [www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com) or call 877-322-8228 toll free for more information.
- Make copies, front and back, of important information in your wallet (such as credit cards and your driver’s license) and keep the copies in a secure location.
- If you think you are a victim of identity theft, visit the FTC web site at [www.consumer.gov/idtheft](http://www.consumer.gov/idtheft) and contact your attorney to determine what actions you should take.

## Let The Legal Plan Help You!

The legal plan can help protect you. You can receive consultation from attorneys on preventing identity theft and receive representation in the event it actually occurs.

Your exclusive enrollment opportunity for this new benefit ends [DATE]. Enroll and let the Group Legal Plan protect your rights.

<sup>1</sup> “2008 Identity Fraud Survey Report,” Javelin Strategy and Research, February 2008. <sup>2</sup> Ibid.

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