

Credit Card Security Precautions

The fraudulent use of credit cards is not limited to the loss or theft of actual credit cards. A capable criminal only needs to know your credit card number to fraudulently make numerous charges, including cash withdrawals, against your account. The following are a number of crime prevention tips or recommendations to guard against the illegal use of credit cards.

- Photocopy both the front and back of all your credit cards and keep the copies in a safe and secure location. This will enable you to cancel your credit card as soon as possible if it is lost or stolen.
- Endorse all credit cards as soon as they arrive.
- It is advisable *not* to carry credit cards in your wallet or purse. Carry them separately if possible.
- Carry only the minimum number of credit cards actually needed and **never** leave them unattended.
- When you write a check, **never** allow the salesperson to write down your credit card number on the check. If paying by credit card, **never** let the salesperson write down your driver's license or social security number.
- Avoid signing a blank receipt, whenever possible. Draw a line through blank spaces above the total when you sign card receipts.
- Unless you are *absolutely confident* you are dealing with a reputable company, never give your credit card account number over the telephone.

Don't be fooled by a scam where a con artist wants to verify your credit card number because you won a prize. One current scam involves con artists who call at random. The thief informs the victim that if their VISA card begins with the number four, the victim wins a prize. However, *all* VISA cards begin with the number four, and all MASTERCARDS begin with the number five. The only prize the cardholder gets is the fraudulent use of their credit card.

- Notify credit card companies in advance of a change in address.
- Destroy unused credit card applications such as those received in the mail advising the recipient "you have been pre-approved for"
- Open billing statements promptly and reconcile your card amounts each month, just as you would your checking account.
- If you receive a letter stating you should have received a credit card in the mail, and you have not received it, notify the company or lending institution immediately.
- Beware of vendors calling and attempting to sell merchandise or gifts over the telephone. Don't give them your credit card number.
- Always check catalogues to be sure your credit card number is not on the cover or mail order form. If it is, contact the company and tell them to immediately remove it.
- When you use a credit card to make a purchase, maintain visual contact with the card and make sure not extra imprints of your card are made to other charge slips. Destroy all the carbons so no one can obtain your account number.
- It is a good idea to retain your credit card receipts and check them against the monthly billing statement.
- In the event your credit card is lost or stolen, immediately notify the credit card company. Most issuing banks or companies can be reached 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The majority of fraudulent purchases are made within 48 hours of the loss.

Credit card thieves may sometimes call the victim; inform the person that their credit card has been found and that it is being returned. This ploy gives the thief time to go on a charging spree because the card holder never calls to cancel the card.

By virtue of the Fair Credit Billing Act (FCBA), if you report the loss of a credit card before it is used, the card issuer cannot hold you responsible for any unauthorized charges. If a thief uses your credit card before you report it missing, the most you will owe for unauthorized charges on each credit card is \$50.00.