

IMPACT

University of Idaho
Extension

Latah County

208-883-2241, Fax: 208-882-8505

200 S. Almon Street, Suite 201, Moscow, ID 83843

Idaho residents not immune from identity theft challenges

AT A GLANCE

North Idaho residents learn how to protect themselves and their families from current and possible identity theft threats

The Situation

In September 2017, another identity theft attack on U.S. credit users was perpetrated. One of the major credit bureaus, Equifax, was hacked and the personal data of over 143 million Americans was leaked to the identity thieves. Information like Social Security numbers, names, addresses and drivers' license numbers were nicely bundled for anyone surfing the "dark web," in need of a good, existing credit source or waiting to use the information for fraudulent and malicious deeds.

In 2015, the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics estimated that 17.6 million Americans over the age of 16 were victims of identity theft. Idaho is definitely not immune from this crime. Ranking 38th in all the states for number of victims, Idaho residents reported 905 cases in 2012. At an average cost of \$1,500 out of pocket and over 175 hours of time to clean up the damage, this is a staggering white collar crime. For many individuals, they thought looking at their credit bureau reports or bank statements for their information would provide them with all the information they needed to avoid this invasion. People simply do not have the resources or information to protect ALL of their valuable financial information.

Our Response

In the past 10 years, University of Idaho Extension in northern and north central Idaho has offered a workshop called "Protecting Your Personal Identity" 27



Your financial information that you share every day could be just what an identity thief is looking for.

times to youth, adult and elder populations. This workshop never contains the same information. It is constantly updated for the audience, for the current identity theft scams or challenges, and for information on how to avoid or repair identity theft attacks. This workshop covers what identity theft is, how thieves obtain your information, what they do with it, how this crime can affect you and your financial and personal information for years to come, how to minimize your risk, and what to do if you have become a victim. We cover information on all four credit bureaus, Equifax, TransUnion, Experian and Innovis (Innovis is a new smaller credit reporting company), banks and credit unions, Social Security, drivers' license, Internal Revenue Service, passport office, United States Postal Service, Secret Service and the U.S. Trustees office. In addition, we address cyber attacks, social media, Internet and email. These tools have become a great resource for identity thieves and their mission.

Every class comes with a special 47-67 page “workbook” with useful, current identity theft information, the slides from the PowerPoint and resources to help participants get started including the official credit report and a FACTA report application. There are three packets available according to age group and audience (youth, adult and elder). Extra packets are always available at each group for sharing.

To address current issues with Equifax, a special newsletter was sent out to community members and to UI Extension listserv subscribers to give them more information on credit freezes, fraud alerts and credit monitoring services listing pros and cons of each and providing more resources to assist. Recipients were encouraged to forward the information to friends, relatives and co-workers.

Program Outcomes

In a post-survey, participants in all workshops responded in similar ways regardless of age or social and economic background. Comments like “this is scary stuff,” “how easy this happens,” and “I never thought about people wanting this information” were common. After completing the hour long workshop, 89 percent of one sample group said that they would reduce their risk for identity theft by re-evaluating their normal day-to-day actions. Another 91 percent said they felt confident they would know what to do in case they were a victim of identity theft and that they would be more careful when sharing personal or financial information. In addition, these same participants said they would ask the vendor why they needed this information and what they planned to do with it once they were finished with it. Over the year, several participants have asked for help with pulling their credit reports and reviewing them since attending classes.

For future plans and behavior modifications, participants reported that within the next three months, they planned to:

- Download all of my credit reports
- Freeze my credit
- Opt out of pre-approved credit offers
- Carry fewer credit cards and my Social Security card
- Report anything “weird” on my statements
- Balance my credit card statement
- Shred EVERYTHING!
- Keep my purse out of the shopping cart or the back of the chair
- Refuse phone calls from numbers I don’t know
- Change all of my passwords
- Won’t use the same password for every account
- Make copies of cards in my wallet
- Get a locking mailbox

- File my income taxes early
- Avoid phishing attempts on FaceBook
- Think before I post (FaceBook and social media)
- Never give out my Social Security number
- Come back to the class every time you offer it

They all planned to share this information with friends, family and co-workers.

After sending out the special newsletter addressing the Equifax hack, I received a call from one of the local financial planning firms. He was calling to tell me “thanks for all you do!” He went on to tell me that all the information I share with him, he shares with his clients. He was at a loss for what to tell his clients and then my email showed up on his desk. The identity theft information was most helpful and provided him with the tool he needed to help his clients. University of Idaho Extension outreach is far and wide with our community partners that help spread the word.

In addition, workshop packets are highly sought after resources. Former participants request them or send friends/family members for their own copies. All of this information has also been shared with colleagues in Idaho for their use and distribution as well.

We cannot stop identity theft but we can give our stakeholders the tools they need to minimize the risk.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Karen Richel, Extension Educator, Financial Literacy
University of Idaho Extension, Latah County
200 S. Almon Street, Suite 201
Moscow, ID 83843
Phone: 208-883-2241
Fax: 208-882-8505
Email: krichel@uidaho.edu