



Protect Against Identity Theft to Preserve Your Real Estate Dreams

Identity theft is a serious crime and an important issue impacting both home buyers and REALTORS® across the nation. Many consumers first learn they are victims of identity theft while in the process of buying a home. Because identity theft can devastate a good credit rating, many real estate dreams are put on hold while the victims of identity theft work to rebuild their good name and credit.

While no one is immune from identity theft, these guidelines can help you to better protect your credit and increase the likelihood of realizing your home ownership dreams.

Deter identity thieves by safeguarding your information

- Shred financial documents with personal information before you discard them.
- Protect your Social Security number. Don't carry your Social Security card in your wallet or write the number on a check.
- Don't give out personal information to anyone unless you know who they are.
- Don't use an obvious password like your birth date, your mother's maiden name, or the last four digits of your Social Security number.
- Keep your personal information in a secure place at home, especially if you have roommates or employ outside help.

Detect suspicious activity

Routinely monitor your financial accounts and billing statements. Monitor your credit report annually. You are legally entitled to receive a free copy of your credit report every year upon request. To order yours, visit www.AnnualCreditReport.com, a service created by the major consumer reporting companies.

Be alert to signs that require immediate attention:

- Bills that do not arrive as expected
- Unexpected credit cards or account statements
- Denials of credit for no apparent reason
- Calls or letters about purchases you did not make

Defend against identity theft as soon as you suspect it

- Place a "Fraud Alert" on your credit reports, and review the reports carefully. The alert tells creditors to follow certain procedures before they open new accounts in your name or make changes to your existing accounts.
- Close any accounts that have been tampered with or established fraudulently.

- File a report with law enforcement officials to help you with creditors who may want proof of the crime.
- Report the theft to the Federal Trade Commission. This will help law enforcement officials across the country in their investigations.

Information furnished by the Montgomery County Association of REALTORS® in conjunction with the National Association of REALTORS®.

