

DAY 2 – ECONOMICS BLIZZARD BAG

TOPIC: Avoiding Identity Theft

- 1. Read the orientation to Avoiding Identity Theft.**
- 2. Perform the Identity Theft Self-Audit.**
 - a. Step 1 – complete the survey.**
 - b. Step 2 – answer the questions listed on another sheet of paper.**
 - c. Step 3 – identify three actions you can take to reduce your vulnerability to identity theft and document the actions you took.**
 - d. Submit documents completed in Steps 1 through 3.**

Avoiding Identity Theft

Identity theft is the misuse of your personal information for illegal purposes. Every two seconds, there is a new victim of identity theft in the United States. Those most likely to experience the crime are in the 18-to-29 age bracket. Unfortunately, experts expect identity theft to increase in the future. You can take action, though, to help protect your personal information.

Why protect yourself against identity theft?

An identity thief leaves a trail of bills that leads back to you. You may still be struggling to clear up the mess years later. In the meantime, your credit can be affected. You may have a harder time getting a car, a student loan, or a place to rent or buy. You might be charged higher credit card fees and interest rates. Collection agencies may continue to contact you long after the crime was committed. Your identity may even be used if the thief, posing as you, is apprehended for a crime.

How can you protect yourself against identity theft?

Use these tips and the self-audit on the next page to help protect yourself from identity theft.

- 1 Become informed.** Learn ways to avoid identity theft and what to do if your information is lost or stolen. Check out resources such the Federal Trade Commission site, www.ftc.gov. Search for their “Deter, Detect, Defend” page, and take a look at other hyperlinks on the site. Research other Web sites for information and tips.
- 2 Safeguard personal information.** Keep your Social Security card and other personal information in a safe place at home. Do not carry your Social Security card or the number with you, and do not give the number or other personal information over the phone, through the mail, or over the Internet unless you have initiated the contact and know whom you are working with. An identity thief can pose as a representative from a legitimate company.
- 3 Shred financial documents.** Shred your charge receipts, credit card offers, old checks, bank statements, and other personal paperwork. Identity thieves pick through trash to get information.
- 4 Pay attention to bills.** A missing bill may mean an identity thief has changed your billing address. Contact the company immediately. Closely check your credit card statements for charges you did not make, and watch for account statements that are not yours.
- 5 Protect your computer.** Make certain you have firewalls, antispyware, and antivirus software on your home computer and laptop and that those protections are up to date. Don’t click on links sent in e-mails from strangers. Type the Web address into your browser instead.
- 6 Protect your mail.** Take outgoing mail containing checks or other personal information to the post office. Pick up mail from your mailbox as soon as it arrives. Consider getting a locking mailbox or renting a mailbox at a postal facility.

Performing an Identity Theft Self-Audit

Perform a self-audit to assess your vulnerability to identity theft.

Step 1 Circle an answer on the spectrum for each statement below.

	always	almost always	some- times	almost never	never
1. I keep paperwork with my personal and financial information in a secure place at all times.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I do not share my personal or financial information electronically in e-mail or online.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I shred paperwork with my personal and financial information before discarding.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I do not conduct personal or financial business on public computers or in public wireless hot spots.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I ignore and close Internet pop-ups asking for my personal or financial information.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I drop off my mail in a secure mailbox and pick up the mail promptly after it arrives.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I know approximately when my bills should arrive and I watch for them.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I review my account statements carefully for unauthorized charges.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I check my free credit report once a year online at www.AnnualCreditReport.com .	1	2	3	4	5
10. I know what telephone numbers to call if I detect suspicious activity on my accounts.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I have updated firewall, antispyware, and antivirus software installed on my computer.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I ignore and delete unsolicited e-mails, especially those with links or attachments.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I do not use obvious passwords (such as my birth date, my mother's maiden name, or my Social Security number) for online accounts.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I use privacy settings to limit who can access and post on my pages at social-networking Web sites.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I only post information on my pages at social-networking Web sites that I am comfortable letting others see.	1	2	3	4	5

Step 2 Answer these questions on another sheet of paper.

- What most surprised you in responding to these statements?
- Which of the actions listed are ideas you had not considered?
- Which of the actions listed are most applicable and important to you?

Step 3 Identify at least three actions you can take to reduce your vulnerability to identity theft. Perform these actions, and report what you did. Try to provide some evidence for one of your actions, such as the list of phone numbers to call if you detect suspicious activity on your accounts.