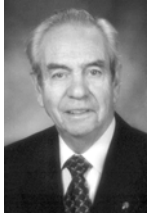


Avoid identity theft



By Bud McGinnis

At ABCs of Fraud presentations we routinely ask this question, “Who among you has your Birth Certificate and/or Social Insurance (SIN) card in your purse or wallet today? Usually several hands are raised. We then ask, “Why, when was the last time you used either?” The response is generally that the cards have always been there and they’ve never thought about it. When you do think about it, however, there really are very few circumstances when either is needed.

Conversely, think what these cards can do in the hands of criminals. Both are significant identifiers of who you are. Criminals can quickly steal your identity and take advantage of your good name. Indeed, Identity Theft tops the list of Frauds and Scams for 2008 as prepared by the Ottawa Police Service. The information on these cards together with what is readily available in the phone book and elsewhere is all that’s needed to open bank accounts and acquire credit cards all in your name. And since these new accounts and cards are in your name you are responsible for any shortfalls and expenses incurred.

It’s important to take whatever precautions we can against Identity Theft. Because of these possibilities we always recommend that you remove Birth Certificates and SIN cards from purses and wallets and store them in a safe and secure place at home or in a Safety Deposit Box. Take them with you only when you know they’ll be needed. Money lost to identity thieves is rarely recovered. Moreover, it takes considerable time, effort, and money to regain your identity.

Finally, we offer a couple of suggestions to forewarn against Identity Theft. First, it’s recommended that at least once each year we each request our Personal Credit Report from TransUnion (1-877-713-3393) or Equifax (1-877-323-2598). These two companies maintain an up-to-date accounting of requests for credit on our accounts and our credit worthiness. Annually, if requested, they will provide us with a full report at no cost. Reviewing the report will quickly identify any unauthorized requests for loans, applications for credit cards, and so forth. Second, it’s recommended that each of us develop a list of dates during the month when

monthly statements such as utility bills, financial accounts, and credit card statements can be expected. Failure of these documents to arrive on schedule may indicate that your address has been changed and your identity is being compromised. Check with the organizations to determine that the statements did go out, and if they did, follow up with the various institutions, and inform the police.

Last month's earthquake in Haiti caused untold loss of life and misery. Nations from around the world immediately responded with offers of help, and many charitable organizations actively solicited funds to support the cause. Fraudsters are ever present and ready to take advantage when an opportunity arises. In this case, immediately after the earthquake struck, fraudsters established bogus charities that claimed to be collecting funds for the earthquake ravaged Haitians. Actually they just funneled money directly into the pockets of the fraudsters. We must remember that whether a charitable request is the result of a natural disaster, as in this case, or results from a phone call soliciting funds for a local organization, it's important to know the facts. Be sure that your contribution is truly going to the purpose intended and not into the pocket of a criminal. Confirm that the charity is approved by CRA (Canada Revenue Agency). Ask for a tax receipt. Inquire what proportion of the donation goes to help the needy and how much is taken for administration and advertising expenses.

Now, as always, we close with the offer of a free presentation to any group wishing to learn more about avoiding victimization by fraudsters and scam artists. Just dial 613-564-5555 and leave a message. (In Kingston call 613-374-2075). A Rotarian will call back to make arrangements and whenever possible a police officer will participate.

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