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# Identity Crisis

Don't let one of the fastest-growing crimes in America spoil your holidays. Get the protection you need through the GEICO Insurance Agency.

*You're traveling the seven seas. Staying in fancy hotels. Living it up. Wait, that doesn't sound like you ...* Because it's not. Identity theft happens every day and costs Americans billions. It can have severe consequences on your long-term finances, affecting interest rates you receive for a home or auto loan or even denying you employment after a credit check. Luckily, there are ways to avoid the tricks of ID thieves—or to catch a problem early and resolve it fast.

## IT'S A STEAL

"One of the scariest things you can ever go through is identity theft," says Matt McCarthy, a GEICO identity theft project manager in Fredericksburg, Va. As any pickpocket at a busy mall knows, you may be carrying around all kinds of personal information in your backpack. Credit cards, bank account data, your social security number—all are within reach of wily thieves who gain access to your wallet or smartphone. Even paper bills and credit card offers that you've tossed into the trash can give robbers all the ammunition they need to steal your identity and wreak havoc on your personal life.

## DIGITAL FRAUDSTERS

Beware, too, of cyber criminals: online scammers who can't wait for you to click on a bogus email or website and unknowingly reveal too much. Data breaches—where hackers gain access to consumers' personal information—have grown by 67 percent since 2010, according to a recent identity fraud report from Javelin Strategy & Research. Who can forget that massive data leak earlier this year when over a million Visa and MasterCard accounts in the United States were said to have been compromised?

With social media inviting you to share your birth date and other personal data, opportunities abound for scammers to access your information. "You wouldn't believe how much is tied to your birth date and social security number," says McCarthy. Such information is sold by thieves and can be used to receive benefits through tax returns. Even your child's squeaky-clean background and pristine credit score create a tantalizing target for enterprising fraudsters. Luckily, adds McCarthy, "the ID Theft product offered through the GEICO Insurance Agency includes coverage for the whole family."

## TO CATCH A THIEF

If your identity has been stolen, the ID Theft protection program through the GEICO Insurance Agency can pick up on it. At a cost of \$75 a year per person or \$85 per family, it keeps tabs on your credit activity. Should someone check your credit, you'll be notified by email. "You'll get the agency, company name, the date it occurred and what the scenario is," says McCarthy. So if someone tries to buy a car using your name, you'll know.

If you notice suspicious activity yourself, the ID Theft service can contact local authorities on your behalf and forward the police report to your creditors. The package also offers "full service resolution," which means a dedicated specialist will handle the administration to help you resolve the crime. They can put a credit freeze on your account, dispute each fraudulent occurrence and monitor the use of your social security number and address. Such cases can take more than 30 hours of work to resolve on your own, but the ID Theft protection plan through the GEICO Insurance Agency can do it in as little as three hours, says McCarthy.

## SAFE TRAVELS

Even if you're thousands of miles from home, you'll still be covered. If your ID is stolen while you're on vacation, the ID Theft protection service through the GEICO Insurance Agency will make emergency travel arrangements and forward you a cash advance through the secured credit card of someone you trust. If it's a medical breach, the ID Theft service provider will help get your medical records and claims straight. "You can never be fully prepared for identity theft," says McCarthy, "but having an ID Theft protection plan can help you deal with the stress by providing quick solutions and giving you your life back." 