

ISSUE #19 – 1st Quarter 2007**- Identity Theft -- Your Own Social Security is At Stake****Identity Theft & Job Seekers**

What does eating a big, juicy hamburger and identity theft have in common? Plenty, judging from recent U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids at meat-processing plants across the country which resulted in numerous arrests. According to Homeland Security officials, many of the illegal immigrants caught in the operation are also suspected of buying and stealing other people's identities to secure American jobs.

Identity thieves will often use a stolen Social Security number with other false identification in an effort to secure employment. Because employers are not able to legally hire new employees without proper documentation, a vast underground market of buying and selling stolen personal information has developed to meet the demands of illegal job seekers.

The successful Immigration and Customs raids highlight the disturbing--and increasing--trend that foreign nationals are using false identification to gain employment in this country. What compounds this problem is that employers often have difficulty screening applicants and verifying the legitimacy of personal documents.

But employers are not always at fault. Properly identifying fraudulent personal documents requires an expert eye, investigative know-how, access to data bases, and even sophisticated technology. Many counterfeit documents look like the real thing; they have an authentic look and feel. Furthermore, employers must be mindful about various legal restrictions surrounding job-hiring: they need to stay clear of discrimination or excessive questioning into personal details where they are not authorized to probe by law.

Because problems arising from identity-theft abuse are always changing, they will justify continued scrutiny and prevention by law enforcement officials. But what can you personally do to protect yourself from thieves using your Social Security number for employment purposes? Identity theft, after all, involves more than just credit card fraud.

The grim reality is that because your personal information is everywhere and is easily accessible, prevention is nearly impossible. Therefore, early detection is the best technique for protection and that is what we highlight here.

Prevention Tip!

You should review your credit report and your Social Security Earnings report to ensure that they are accurate. This will also help you avoid having the Internal Revenue Service seek payment from you for unpaid taxes.

Review Your Social Security Administration Statement of Earnings and Benefits

Your Social Security Statement is both a personal record of the earnings on which you have paid Social Security taxes during your working years and a summary of the estimated benefits you and your family may receive as a result of those earnings.

There are two primary reasons why you should review your Social Security Statement: 1) to ensure its accuracy; and 2), to identify your estimated benefits.

Keeping an accurate and ongoing record of your estimated benefits is important for financial and retirement planning. And that is why being aware of identity theft is especially critical.

Not only will the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) seek unpaid tax payments on income that has been fraudulently reported in your name, the IRS will likely overstate the level of Social Security Administration (SSA) benefits you have accumulated to date, neither of which are accurate nor beneficial.

To better ensure the accuracy of your Social Security Statement and to detect possible identity theft, review your personal Statement each year at the very minimum. The SSA provides Statements via two ways:

1) Automatically. The SSA automatically delivers annual Statements by mail to workers and former workers ages 25 and older. (You can expect to receive an annual Statement about three months before the month of your birth.)

2) Upon request. Any worker of any age can request a Statement at any time. Simply visit:
<http://www.socialsecurity.gov/mystatement/>

Remember that identity theft, inaccurate information, or simple mistakes in data entry can affect your ability to access all the benefits that you have legally earned. The sooner you correct these mistakes, the better off you will be. Moreover, if you have questions about identity fraud or believe you are a possible victim, please contact us toll-free at:
1-866-4ID-FRAUD.

We'll provide you with the assistance that you need. After all, your future should be safe and secure.