



# Consumer Watch

A Monthly Newsletter from the Connecticut Department of Consumer Protection

William M. Rubenstein, Commissioner

Dannel P. Malloy, Governor

[www.ct.gov/dcp](http://www.ct.gov/dcp)

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## Suggested Links

[www.ct.gov/dcp](http://www.ct.gov/dcp)

Our website offers the latest and most comprehensive information that we have on dozens of consumer-related topics!

[www.SmartConsumer.ct.gov](http://www.SmartConsumer.ct.gov)

Basic information for consumers of all ages to protect themselves and avoid scams!

<https://www.elicense.ct.gov>

To verify a license, permit or registration, or to run a roster of licensees. Also, the place for online renewal!

## Contact Us

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[dcp.communications@ct.gov](mailto:dcp.communications@ct.gov)

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## Identity Theft: Prevention Still Best Remedy

Since it came into public awareness around 2004, identity theft continues to be one of the fastest growing crimes in the United States. In February of this year, the Javelin Strategy and Research Group reported that its latest survey found that 13.1 million U.S. consumers encountered identity theft in 2013. But while scammers' methods continue to evolve and evade, the dollar amount stolen dropped from \$21 billion in 2012 to \$18 billion in 2013; a result, researchers believe, of more aggressive action from consumers, financial institutions and identity protection providers.

Information that can be taken from a pile of seemingly unrelated papers might include a home address and birthdate on one, a copy of a cancelled check on another, and a social security number on a third. This is plenty of information for a thief to open new credit card or bank accounts, take out loans, or apply for government benefits. While many identity theft victims never incur a high amount of direct monetary loss, the process of restoring one's good credit and correcting misinformation can be time-consuming and costly.



Prevention continues to be the best medicine. Keeping personal information away from people who might use it for their own gain is a critical form of protection. Shredding personal documents instead of just tossing them away, keeps private information safe. **On May 31<sup>st</sup>, the Department of Consumer Protection will host a 3-hour paper shredding event in Hartford, free and open to anyone. (See page 4 for details)** Our event is just one of many. To find others, contact your bank and other financial institutions in town and ask at your town hall -- most municipalities have at least one town-wide cleanup each year, usually in the spring or fall. Many charitable organizations offer shredding fundraisers too, so there may be shredding options all around. Don't forget that companies like Info-Shred in East Windsor, Shred-It in Cheshire, Staples and even FedEx stores statewide offer paid shredding for consumers, and frequently run special deals.

## From Commissioner Rubenstein

*With so much spring clean-up underway, we thought we'd focus this issue on the notion of cleaning up and organizing the clutter in our lives – specifically, unneeded paper, records and documents. It's important to clear out in a way that won't put any identifying information into the wrong hands. Given massive data breaches and technology factors over which we have little control, it's notable that consumers have been able to help keep the lid on the damage done by identity thieves, by taking responsibility for their data and the information they can control. Learn more about what to keep and why on page 2. Young people just starting out need to get on board fairly quickly with self-protecting their personal information; they are at high risk. We offer 8 quick tips on page 3 that will get them started in the right direction. Looking for free shredding? We have an event slated for May 31<sup>st</sup> in Hartford. See page 4, where you'll also find a final "congrats" to our Consumer Protection Week student contest winners!*

*Bill Rubenstein*



Commissioner  
William M.  
Rubenstein

## Your Personal Documents: Toss? Shred? Keep?

This guide includes recommendations from numerous sources including the Internal Revenue Service and the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants, about what you should shred to protect your identity, and what you need to hang on to. There are few absolutes, but one rule of thumb is to keep the original of any document that validates something in an IRS filing. These items should be kept with that year's filing, in a safe, fireproof location for at least seven years.\* (Also see page 4)

*\*The IRS has three years from your filing date to audit your return if it suspects good-faith errors. The three-year deadline also applies if you find a mistake in your return and decide to file an amended return to claim a refund. The IRS has six years to challenge your return if it thinks you underreported your gross income by 25 percent or more. There is **no** time limit if the IRS discovers that you failed to file your return or you filed a fraudulent return!*

Document Type	Keep for:
Cancelled checks	Cancelled checks that apply to your IRS tax return should be <b>kept</b> for at least seven years, along with your tax filing for that year. You should <b>SHRED</b> other personal checks after one year.
Pay stubs	<b>Keep</b> for one year. When you receive your annual W-2 form from your employer, make sure the information on your stubs matches. If it does, <b>shred</b> the stubs. If it doesn't match, request a corrected form, known as a W-2c.
Credit card, debit card and ATM receipts	<b>Keep</b> original receipts until you get your monthly statement; <b>shred</b> the receipts if they match the statement.
Credit card statements	<b>Keep</b> if tax-related expenses are documented. Otherwise, <b>shred</b> before discarding.
Health plan statements and policies	<b>Keep</b> explanation-of-benefit forms, receipts and invoices for treatment that is still in progress until treatment and payment is completed, and/or all coverage and payment issues are resolved. If you have medical expenses that are tax-deductible, <b>keep</b> those records with the IRS tax filing for the appropriate number of years. Always <b>shred</b> before discarding. <b>Keep</b> your policy paperwork for as long as you have the policy along with documentation for any unresolved claims.
Bank Statements	<b>Shred</b> after verifying them against your checks and checkbook.
Any statements that bear your name and address, account number or phone number (such as utility/cable bills)	In most cases you may <b>shred</b> after paying the bill and receiving cancelled check.
Any document with your signature or social security number	If not needed for any other purpose, <b>shred</b> .
Warranty documents, instructions and receipts for expensive items	<b>Keep</b> for as long as you own the items.
Store receipts for non-warranted items	<b>Keep</b> receipt until no chance of return or exchange, then <b>discard</b> if they are not credit receipts. <b>Shred</b> credit receipts.
Contracts, invoices, warranties and receipts for home improvement work	<b>Keep</b> until you sell the house, then <b>shred</b> .
Vehicle lease or purchase records, maintenance records, warranties, title	<b>Keep</b> until you sell the vehicle or return leased vehicle to the dealer. <b>Then keep or shred</b> lease or purchase papers. Give maintenance and warranty documents to buyer when transaction is final.
Stock, bond, mutual fund purchase / sale documents, retirement plan documents	<b>Keep</b> for IRS reporting and as long as you own the funds.
IRA / retirement plan statements	Contribution records should be <b>kept</b> . <b>Keep</b> nondeductible contribution records to prove that you already paid tax on this money when the time comes to withdraw. <b>Keep</b> quarterly statements from your other plans until you receive the annual summary; if everything matches up, shred the quarterlies. <b>Keep</b> annual summaries until you retire or close the account.
Auto, home insurance records	<b>Keep</b> your policy paperwork for as long as you have the policy and <b>keep</b> documentation for any unresolved claims of coverage.

### True or False?

It is not necessary or even recommended to run a credit report check on anyone under the age of 18. **True or False?** **Answer, page 4**

***Some documents are forever!***  
***Find out what they are***  
***on page 4 ...***

## What Teens, College Students and Grads Needs to Know about Identity Theft

*Entering college or the “real world” job market for the first time is a thrilling and slightly frightening experience. What would it be like to find out that your good name and what you thought was a squeaky clean credit rating had been victimized over several years by thousands of dollars of unauthorized debt due to identity theft – that you knew nothing about?*

Employers and landlords are increasingly running credit report checks on the applicants they are considering. Clearing up a mess of bad credit is not anyone’s idea of getting off on the right foot.

Of the 290,000 identity theft complaints reported to the Federal Trade Commission in 2013, twenty percent were from young adults (see Figure 1). The combined “19 and Under” and “20-29” age groups – six percent and twenty percent respectively -- together make up more than a quarter of the population who already report being affected by identity theft.

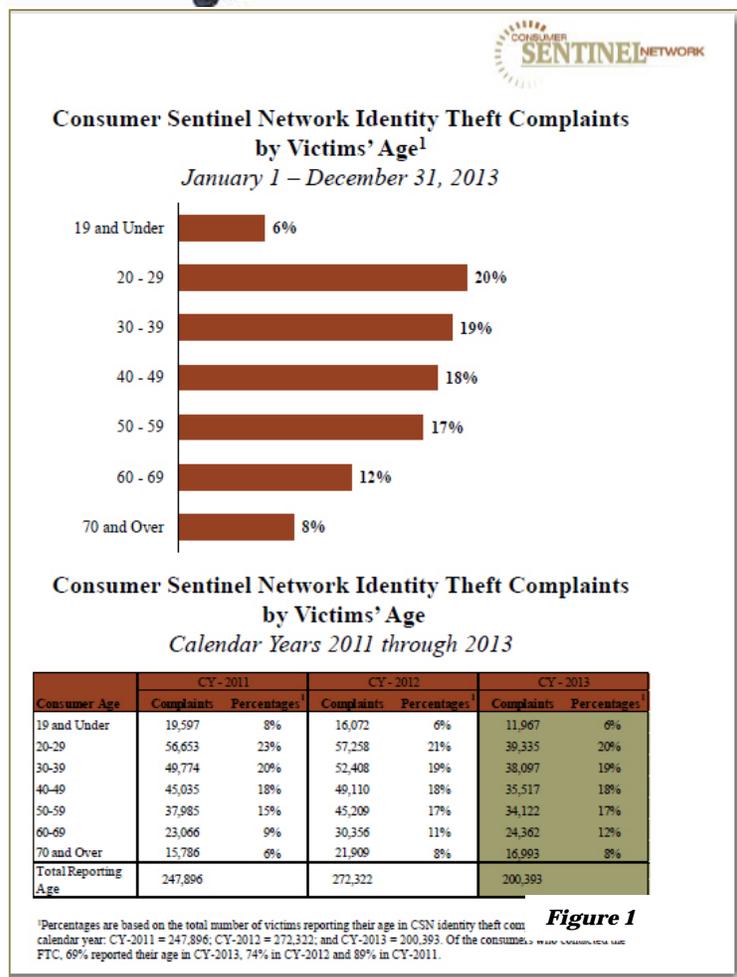
Teens and young adults may be more vulnerable to identity theft for a number of reasons, least of which is that they are busy with more interesting endeavors! Also, the frequency and normalcy of requests for personal information and documentation that they address throughout their school-age years may desensitize them to the need to keep certain types of information secure.

A messy nest of papers in the back seat of a student’s car could be a treasure chest to an identity thief. Bank statements, cancelled checks, a random job application with a social security number, a utility bill – these can be spun into gold by someone with the right skills and criminal mindset. It’s enough data to open a credit account, get some extra checks for the existing account, or open a new account and write bad checks. Truly, it’s enough to create a whole new identity, maybe in a different city or state! Many identity theft victims don’t lose a great amount of money. But, restoring their good credit history and correcting the negative information can be tedious.

Young persons need to be told (possibly again and again) the consequences of identity theft so they can be prepared to deal with the steady stream of credit offers and requests for personal information that will become part of their adult life. Here are eight tips to get young adults off on the right foot identity-wise:

### 8 Identity-Smart Tips for Teens, Grads & Young Adults

1. Don’t carry your Social Security card in your wallet. Memorize the number. Keep the card locked up at home.
2. If your college uses your Social Security number for your student I.D., ask for an assigned number. There are *very* few places where your Social Security number absolutely must be used. A) your employer needs it for wage and tax reporting purposes; B) opening a bank account or applying for credit; C) renting an apartment or getting utilities often requires a credit check; your social security number is needed for that.
3. Shred any pre-approved credit card offers along with the unneeded parts of your bills before putting them in the trash.
4. Don’t put outgoing mail in unsecured campus mailboxes or in your home mailbox with the red flag “up.” Crooks target mailboxes. Deposit your outgoing mail directly in U.S. Postal Service mailboxes.
5. Your computer and device passcodes should be at least seven characters and not easy to guess; don’t use the same one on everything and change them every couple months.
6. Pay bills and buy online **ONLY** from a secure computer line – never over public wi-fi.
7. Install virus and malware protection and keep it, along with your system software, up-to-date.
8. Go to [www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com) and run one of your free credit reports now and the other two in a few months. Repeat every year.





Commissioner Rubenstein welcomed and personally congratulated (l-r) Brian Liao of Glastonbury, Makaila Cerrone of East Hampton and Erin Special of Norwich on April 29<sup>th</sup> as they picked up their prizes from the SmartConsumer Contest held during Consumer Protection Week in March. All winners also received a signed Proclamation from Governor Dannel P. Malloy.

## Lock 'Em Up!

*These records should be kept permanently in a fireproof box, safety deposit box or home safe:*

- birth certificates, marriage certificates, death certificates
- wills and living wills
- divorce decree and property agreements
- Social Security cards
- passports
- college transcripts
- mortgage documents
- loan agreements
- insurance policies
- home inventory
- automobile titles and property deeds
- health plan documents
- pension- and retirement-plan documents
- stock purchase agreements
- tax returns

BACK BY POPULAR DEMAND...

# FREE BULK PAPER SHREDDING!

The Department of Consumer Protection and Info-Shred invite you to:



2014

## "SPRING INTO SUMMER" A SPECIAL FREE SHREDDING EVENT

TO HELP STOCK THE HOCKANUM VALLEY COMMUNITY COUNCIL FOOD PANTRY IN VERNON, CT

Saturday, May 31, 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. *Rain or shine*

Parking lot, corner of Oak Street and Capitol Avenue, Hartford

Near Interstate 84 across from the Capitol and Legislative Office Building

Donate one bag (any size) of non-perishable food and household items for every bag or box of paper you bring for shredding (Max: four per vehicle) Suggested items: Rice, peanut butter, jelly, canned tuna, pasta, sauce, cereal, oatmeal, beans, boxed macaroni and cheese, canned ravioli, canned or dry soup, canned vegetables and fruit, juice boxes and bottles, powdered milk, toilet paper, paper towels, plastic wrap, soap, toothpaste, shampoo.

**NOTE: To serve as many as possible, shredding is limited to four (4) bags or boxes per vehicle.**

The Hockanum Valley Community Council Food Pantry will be on hand to accept food donations to help area families in need over the summer months. [www.hvcchelps.org](http://www.hvcchelps.org)

*This event is three hours only -- first come, first served!*

Staples, envelopes and papers clips are OK. Please, no business shredding.

QUESTIONS: EMAIL [DCP.COMMUNICATIONS@CT.GOV](mailto:DCP.COMMUNICATIONS@CT.GOV)

STATE OF CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER PROTECTION

[www.ct.gov/dcp](http://www.ct.gov/dcp)

### True or False

*(answer from page 2)*

The answer is **False**. In fact, for anyone of any age with a social security number, it is important to check whether there are credit reports in their name and to correct or dispute inaccurate information in the reports. Youth are particularly vulnerable to identity theft because their personal information may have been shared for years with little thought of protection. Check minors' credit reports by age 16 and each year after. Correct credit reporting errors before a young person turns 18, because being underage may make it easier to demonstrate that the credit report is incorrect. Bad credit reports can be more difficult and complicated to clean up later, and can affect a young person's options for living independently.