



## DATCP, DOR Offer Tips for Identity Theft Prevention and Protection

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MADISON, Wis. – It's Identity Theft Awareness Week. To help Wisconsin consumers and taxpayers protect themselves from identity theft, the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) and Wisconsin Department of Revenue (DOR) are partnering to promote best practices for identity theft prevention and share trusted resources.

While identity theft can occur year-round, consumers should take special care during "tax season," between January and April, to keep their personal information secure. Tax-related identity theft occurs when a consumer's Social Security number (SSN) is stolen and misused, usually to obtain a job or fraudulently file a tax return to receive a consumer's tax refund. A consumer might not realize their identity has been stolen until the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) or DOR informs them of unreported income or multiple tax return filings.

It is almost impossible to prevent all identity theft, but consumers can lower their risk by placing credit report security freezes and fraud alerts, signing up for federal and state Identity Protection Personal Identification Numbers (IP PINs), and regularly monitoring their credit report.

### Protecting Personal Information

A consumer is their own first line of defense against fraud. By safeguarding their personal information and only sharing it with trusted sources when necessary, consumers can minimize the risk of that information being compromised, stolen, or misused.

- Avoid storing sensitive personal information on devices like a cell phone or personal computer. These devices, and the data on them, can be fraudulently accessed by scammers or identity thieves. If personal information must be stored temporarily, it should be deleted as soon as it is no longer needed, and the device's trash/recycle bin should be emptied so the data cannot be accessed.
- Secure incoming and outgoing mail. Install a mailbox lock, have important mail sent to a Post Office (PO) Box, and send sensitive mail by visiting a post office.
- When physical documents that contain personal information are no longer needed, destroy them using a micro-cut shredder.
- Do not share personal information in response to a cold call, text message, or email. If a message appears to come from a legitimate organization, verify their contact details with official sources and reach out to the organization directly.

### Place a Security Freeze and Fraud Alert on Credit

A security freeze prevents new lines of credit from being opened in a consumer's name and stays in place until the consumer lifts it. A fraud alert requires that creditors take extra steps to verify a consumer's identity before extending them credit. Learn more about both options from DATCP's [Credit Report Security Freeze](#) fact sheet.

- Sign up for a security freeze by contacting all three major credit reporting agencies to request it: Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion.
- Place a fraud alert by contacting any of the three major credit reporting agencies. When one agency receives a fraud alert request, they must inform the other two.

## **Sign Up for Federal and State IP PINs**

IP PINs add extra security to tax filings by requiring consumers to verify their identity when filing tax returns. There are separate IP PINs for filing federal tax returns and state tax returns.

- Sign up for and learn more about federal IP PINs from [IRS.gov](https://www.irs.gov).
- Find frequently asked questions and sign-up instructions for Wisconsin IP PINs from the DOR's website at [revenue.wi.gov](https://revenue.wi.gov).

Time is of the essence when reacting to identity theft, so consumers affected by tax-related identity theft – or who received a notice about tax-related identity theft from DOR – should contact DOR as soon as possible at (608) 266-2772 or [DORIDTheft@wisconsin.gov](mailto:DORIDTheft@wisconsin.gov). DOR will not call or email consumers to verify their information or inform them about suspicious activity. Instructions for reporting tax-related identity theft to the IRS can be found in their online [Identity Theft Guide for Individuals](#). Consumers whose identities have been stolen should also immediately inform their bank(s) and creditor(s) to prevent further fraud.

For more information and consumer protection resources or to file a complaint, visit DATCP's Consumer Protection webpage at [ConsumerProtection.wi.gov](https://ConsumerProtection.wi.gov) or contact the Consumer Protection Hotline at (800) 422-7128 or [DATCPHotline@wisconsin.gov](mailto:DATCPHotline@wisconsin.gov).

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