

# ***Fox Crossing Police Department***

## **CRIME PREVENTION ALERT**

### **IDENTITY THEFT - 101**

In today's ever changing technological environment, you are more likely to be a victim of a theft or fraud committed through the use of a computer or financial transaction. Since the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) began recording consumer complaint data in 2000, identity theft has remained the most common consumer fraud complaint. In 2012, about 12.6 million Americans were reportedly victims of identity fraud, and the average identity fraud victim incurred a loss of \$365 as a result of the fraud.

#### ***What is Identity Theft?***

Wisconsin law defines identity theft as, *"...whoever intentionally uses, attempts to use or possesses with intent to use any personal identifying information or personal identification document of an individual, including a deceased individual,...to obtain credit, money, goods, services, employment or any other thing of value or benefit, or to avoid civil or criminal process or penalty, or to harm the reputation, property, person or estate of the individual."*

#### ***Does it happen here?***

Fraud victims come from all demographics and across the country. A ten year crime trend study (2004 – 2013) showed over 300 cases of fraud (identity theft, credit card, scams, forgery) with losses of almost \$65,000 in the Town of Menasha.

#### **RECENT EXAMPLES OF TOWN OF MENASHA CASES**

- As officers were investigating another case they noticed that the person had numerous credit card bills in different people's names. After investigation, it was determined that she worked at a store in Green Bay and would take people's information from the credit card applications and use that information to obtain credit cards and had them billed to her address.
- A resident purchases a car from a dealer out east. Several weeks later he checks his credit report and notices that a credit card taken out in his name that he was unaware of. Charges of almost \$500 are made on this card at various online stores.
- A man goes to use his ATM for a withdrawal and is denied due lack of funds. He does some checking and finds charges totaling over \$2,000 in Louisiana
- A woman is contacted by VISA regarding some suspicious activity on her account – a laptop and vacation package totaling \$2,000 were purchased within the same day.

### ***How does it happen?***

Traditionally, criminals gained access to a victim's personal information from a stolen wallet or mail. However, we are seeing online and mobile threats rapidly grow; in fact there are 105 million smart phone users and 42 million tablet users in the United States. Fraudsters use malware, exploit software vulnerabilities, launch phishing attacks, and compromise unsecured Wi-Fi connections to obtain users' personal information.

### ***Combating Identity Theft***

In addition to the many laws targeting identity theft and fraud, financial institutions are taking actions to limit this from occurring. Many businesses and banks use a combination of safeguards to protect your information such as: employee training, strict privacy policies, rigorous security standards, encryption of information, and fraud detection programs and procedures.

By the fall of 2015, all credit cards will contain a microchip that will store payment data rather than the present magnetic stripe. How it works is that this chip will generate a single-use code to process only that one transaction through a merchant's server. This makes the card nearly impossible to counterfeit because even if the data is hacked, it can't be used again.

## **HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF FROM CREDIT CARD FRAUD**

### **USE GOOD PASSWORD PRACTICES**

- Include numbers, special characters and capital letters.
- Stay away from words found in the dictionary.
- Don't use the same password for everything.
- Change passwords often.

### **BE CAREFUL OF SUSPICIOUS E-MAIL**

- Don't open messages from people you don't know.
- Never click on a link or open an attachment if you don't know the e-mail sender.

### **CHOOSE CREDIT OVER DEBIT**

- Attackers won't have your PIN to access your account.
- Credit card charges are easier to dispute.
- If your credit card is stolen, you won't be responsible for more than \$50 in charges.
- If only your number is used, not the card, you're not liable for any charges.

### **NOTIFY POLICE AND BANK**

- Verify charges on your statement, even small amounts.
- Sign up for a fraud prevention service.
  - Equifax, Experian and TransUnion

*Source: USA Today article Feb. 2014*