

Protect Yourself from Credit Card Fraud



By Greg Abbott
Attorney General of Texas

Millions of credit card transactions take place every day. They are done in person, over the phone and on the Internet. While many credit card companies have instituted safeguards to protect against credit card fraud, the following are steps a consumer can take to protect themselves:

Only carry the credit cards you need. This will minimize the opportunity for fraud in case of theft. In addition, do not keep your PIN numbers in your wallet or purse. It is also a good idea to carry your credit cards separately from your wallet.

When using a credit card in person, never let it out of your possession. It is possible for a dishonest clerk to swipe your credit card with a hand recorder and download your financial information at a later date. Reputable businesses will have their credit card machines near the cash register, in full view of the customer. You should also shield your credit card and PIN numbers from others so that they aren't copied or captured on a cellular telephone camera.

You should also look carefully at the credit card receipt. Is the amount correct? Are there any blanks that can be filled in after you are gone? Destroy

any incorrect receipts and carefully draw a line through any blanks.

Do not give out your credit card number over the telephone unless you initiated the call and know the company is reputable. Legitimate companies and financial institutions never call you to ask for or verify a credit card number. Many consumers have been scammed by telephone in this manner.

Do not e-mail your personal financial information. Thieves may send you an e-mail that appears to be from a well known merchant, with the request that you e-mail your financial information for "verification." No legitimate online sales company will ask you to do this. This is known as "phishing", and is a recent trend in Internet scams.

When shopping online, be sure that you are using a secure server. Check the location at the top of your browser window. The Web page on the merchant's site where you actually enter your personal information should begin with <https://> rather than <http://>. The "s" indicates a secure server.

Keep a secure list of your account numbers and their expiration dates, as well as the telephone numbers and addresses of the banks that issued your credit cards. This will give you quick access to pertinent information needed to report credit card theft.

Sign your credit cards as soon as you receive them. If you receive a credit card application and do not plan to use it, shred it. It is also wise to shred

all receipts and carbon copies before throwing them away. Many criminals literally dig through trash looking for personal financial information.

Be diligent about checking your credit card bill—treat it like a bank statement. Save your sales receipts and compare them to your monthly statement. Report any unauthorized or suspicious charges to the credit card issuer immediately.

The Fair Credit Reporting Billing Act enables you to dispute charges to your credit card in some circumstances and to withhold payment pending the creditor's investigation. If the charges are found to be erroneous or fraudulent, you generally are only held liable for the first \$50 charged to your account.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

CREDIT CARD FRAUD

- Never throw away papers in the trash if they contain your credit card number; shred them
- Never write your credit card number where someone can observe you
- Never lend your credit card to anyone else
- Never respond to an e-mail or telephone call requesting your credit card number

Report credit card scams to:
Attorney General's Office
www.oag.state.tx.us
(800) 252-8011

To get a copy of the Fair Credit Reporting Act:
Federal Trade Commission
www.ftc.gov
(877) 382-4357

For registration information on a business operating in Texas:
Secretary of State's Office
www.sos.state.tx.us
(512) 463-5555



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

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