

## **CREDIT CARD FRAUD: WHAT TO DO IF YOU BECOME A VICTIM**

The Better Business Bureau (BBB) is warning consumers that even if their credit or debit card never leaves their sight, they could still become a victim of fraud or identity theft and need to be prepared to act quickly to minimize the damage.

The 2008 Identity Fraud Survey Report from Javelin Strategy & Research states that fraud is declining in the U.S. – down 12 percent from 2006 – and that 8.1 million Americans were actually victims of identity fraud. However, the Identity Theft Resource Center, says 127 million personal records were reported compromised in the U.S. in 2007, a six-fold increase over the previous year.

BBB is encouraging consumers to become savvier and keep a close eye on their credit and debit card statements for suspicious activity. If they find their card has been stolen or if they have noticed fraudulent charges on their accounts, BBB offers the following advice that will help consumers resolve the issue as quickly as possible:

### **STEP ONE: Contact the Issuer**

Credit card issuers typically have a 24-hour hotline for consumers to report fraud and theft. By law, a consumer's maximum liability is \$50 per credit card; once they have reported a loss or theft of a credit card to the issuer, consumers have no further responsibility for unauthorized charges.

### **STEP TWO: Contact the Authorities**

If a credit or debit card has been stolen or if the consumer has noticed fraudulent charges on their account, they can file a report with the local police. The consumer will get a copy of the police report to confirm the nature of the fraudulent charges with the issuer and the credit reporting bureaus, and should file reports with the Federal Trade Commission, at [www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov).

### **STEP THREE: Contact Credit Reporting Bureaus**

There are three credit bureaus that monitor activity on consumer credit accounts: Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion. A flag or alert will be placed on the account with fraudulent activity. Consumers can also ask to have an account frozen – which means their credit history can't be reviewed by lenders and prevents new lines of credit from being opened – but keep in mind it may take several days to unfreeze accounts in the future.

### **STEP FOUR: Stay Vigilant**

It's a good idea for consumers to follow up calls to their credit card issuer and/or credit bureaus with a letter outlining key details and summarizing when they alerted the issuer and bureau to the loss or fraud.

For more trustworthy advice on identity theft and fraud prevention visit BBB on the Web at: [www.bbb.org](http://www.bbb.org).