

SAFETY SENSE

Identity Theft—Don't Let it Happen to You

(NAPSA)—You can protect yourself from a serious crime. The FBI estimates 500,000 people were victims of identity theft last year. Investigators also have learned that the terrorists who planned the September 11 attacks used stolen Social Security numbers and false IDs to open checking accounts and fund their activities. With this in mind, government officials have cited identity theft as not only one of the fastest growing white-collar crimes in the nation, but also as a threat to national security.

A leading provider of electronic payment, risk management, and related information technology and business-process-improvement services, eFunds Corporation (NASDAQ: EFDS), has found that customers are willing to submit to a personal identifier at their financial institution to help prevent identity theft. However, they could be more vigilant in protecting themselves.

"After September 11, the American public, traditionally wary of intrusion into personal privacy, became more willing to accept stringent regulation to help fight terrorism," said Adam Elliott, eFunds Vice President of Decision Support and Risk Management. "However, as early as last year, half of Americans said that they were not worried about identity theft."

For example, an eFunds' survey commissioned in March 2002 revealed that three out of four people would submit to a personal identifier such as a digitized thumbprint or retinal scan before each account transaction, to enable a financial institution to confirm their identity.

"Many people seem to think the average person isn't a target of identity theft," said Elliott. "But they couldn't be more wrong. People don't know how vulnerable they are to identity theft, and they don't understand the potential harm it inflicts."

Government Intervention

To prevent future terrorist infiltration of the U.S. financial system, Congress passed the USA Patriot Act, which, among other things, requires financial services companies to take greater precautions when opening new accounts.

The Patriot Act mandates that financial institutions, at a minimum, verify the identity of new-



account applicants, maintain records used to verify a person's identity, and consult government lists of known or suspected terrorists before opening an account.

eFunds, which provides identity verification services to financial institutions through its wholly owned subsidiary Chex Systems, Inc., has been working with its customers to encourage consistent background checks of new-account applicants, and to supply services to assist financial institutions with their compliance obligations.

In addition to complying with the new legal requirements, financial institutions also face the task of restoring consumer confidence.

Apart from more due diligence at financial institutions, curbing identity theft requires consumers to handle personal information with more vigilance and caution. Consumers can protect against identity theft by following some simple steps:

- Safeguard checkbooks.
- When paying bills with checks, never leave them in a home mailbox for postal pickup.
- Keep account numbers, personal identification numbers and Social Security numbers in a safe place. Wallets and pocketbooks are not safe places.
- Don't print driver's license numbers or Social Security numbers on checks.
- Shred financial documents that contain account information, such as old bank statements or credit offers.
- Always use an ink pen when writing checks.
- Use caution when providing financial information over the phone or Internet.

For more information about the USA Patriot Act, and eFunds' terrorism survey results, visit www.efunds.com.