

Lock Out Potential Identity Thieves with a Security Freeze

Would you like to 'lock up' your credit information so no one can access it without your permission? Beginning July 1, 2007, Montanans can put a **'security freeze'** on their credit files, which means those files cannot be shared with potential creditors.

A security freeze is one of the most effective ways to prevent identity theft. It helps prevent a thief from falsely using someone else's identity to take out a new mortgage, apply for a credit card, or get financing. The freeze is easily lifted if consumers plan to make a major purchase, open a new credit card, or take out a loan.

A security freeze will not:

- Lower your credit score
- Prevent you from getting your own credit report
- Stop credit card companies from sending you pre-approved credit offers.

To place a security freeze on your credit files, you must write separate letters to each of the three credit bureaus and provide identifying information including, at a minimum, your name, address, and Social Security number. For married couples, both spouses must request to freeze their credit files via separate request letters.

The credit bureaus must place the freeze on your files within five business days of receiving your written request. If you are a victim of identity theft, they must place the freeze within 24 hours of getting the police report and information confirming your identity. Each of the credit bureaus will send you written notice that the freeze is in place within five days of it going into effect. This confirmation will include a personal identification number (PIN) along with instructions on how to lift or remove the freeze.

Placing a security freeze on your credit files costs \$3 per individual, for a total of \$9 to freeze your files with all three credit bureaus. There is no fee for identity theft victims who have filed a police report of identity theft to freeze their files. To have a freeze temporarily lifted also costs \$3 per credit bureau. There is no fee to permanently remove a security freeze.

When a file is protected by a security freeze, a creditor who requests that file will get a message or a code indicating that the file is frozen. However, when you have a security freeze on your credit file, certain entities can still access it, such as existing creditors or collection agencies acting on your behalf. In addition, government agencies can access your report for collecting child support payments or taxes, or for investigating Medicaid fraud. Government agencies may also access it in response to a court or administrative order, a subpoena or a search warrant.

For more information about the new Montana Security Freeze, contact **1st Liberty Federal Credit Union** at (800) 824-0585. If you have questions or concerns about using a security freeze, contact the Montana Office of Consumer Protection at (800) 481-6896 or visit their website at www.doj.mt.gov/consumer/.

Credit Bureau Contact Information:

Equifax Security Freeze

P.O. Box 105788
Atlanta, GA 30348
(800) 525-6285

Experian Security Freeze

P.O. Box 9554
Allen, TX 75013
(888) 397-3742

TransUnion Security Freeze

P.O. Box 6790
Fullerton, CA 92834-6790
(800) 680-7289