

# Insight on Equifax Debacle

**Step Number One:** Relax. No one knows what the odds are that your information will be compromised. But still take it seriously and know that this is important.

**Purpose:** A lot of comments and questions have been raised about this breach. None of us are sure how it will affect us. None of us will magically know everything. So here is some direction put together to address some of the concerns.

**What Happened?** Equifax, one of the three major credit reporting agencies in the United States, was breached and over 140,000,000 people had their credit history stolen. Credit history includes Social Security Numbers, past addresses, previously held accounts, inquired accounts, any bankruptcies within the last seven years, and more.

**How do I know if I was affected?** Most American adults who have held or inquired about a credit card, loan, car, bank account, cell phone account, electric service, water service, internet service, a security clearance, most jobs, most schools, most apartment complexes, or renting a house, have a chance of being affected. Equifax, TransUnion, and Experian are privy to your financial history information.

**So what happens now that my information may have been affected?**

## 1) Get a copy of your credit report today.

Regardless of freeze, alert, or regular credit monitoring get your current credit report to keep on file so you can identify anything new that shouldn't be there in the future.

To do this, go to the website: [Annualcreditreport.com](http://Annualcreditreport.com)

The Federal Government of the United States requires each of those three credit agencies give you a free copy of your credit report every year and this is the only authorized site to actually collect on that. Usually it's suggested that you not get them all at once but if you are concerned that you have been affected, then go ahead and pull all three at once. Document everything well. This is the only real free credit report site.

<https://www.usa.gov/credit-reports#item-35962>

<https://www.transunion.com/annual-credit-report>

<http://www.experian.com/consumer-products/free-credit-report.html>

<https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0155-free-credit-reports>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AnnualCreditReport.com>

## 2) Consider putting a credit freeze in place now.

Call the three credit agencies, and put a freeze on your credit. What does this do? Well, it freezes your credit. Nobody, including yourself, can inquire into your credit for any reason until this freeze is unfrozen. This does not affect current accounts! Your current loans will be fine.

General Information on Credit Freeze:

<http://www.experian.com/blogs/ask-experian/credit-education/preventing-fraud/security-freeze/north-carolina/>

North Carolina Department of Justice states it is free. Sometimes the credit bureaus argue it's not. In the end the credit bureaus can still charge you...

Transunion:

<https://www.transunion.com/credit-freeze/place-credit-freeze2>

Equifax:

<https://www.freeze.equifax.com>

Experian:

<https://www.experian.com/freeze/center.html>

**Does this cost money? Does unfreezing cost money?** It may cost approximately \$30 to unfreeze all three when you need to finance something but here's the bright side: \$30 and a few minutes on the phone with an automated system is a lot easier than the process you would have to go through after having your Identity stolen. Ultimately the fee varies by State.

**Does this affect my credit score?** No. Your credit will go on as usual, but nothing new can be added or inquired during the freeze. You will still be able to use your credit card. Here are the phone numbers to initiate a credit freeze;

TransUnion: 1-888-909-8872

Equifax: 1-800-349-9960

Experian: 1-888 397 3742

If you decide to do this, you should call all three! You can do this online, but Equifax's site has been crashing nonstop since the breach was announced and so it is suggest using the phone. It is an automated system so don't worry about interacting with a person.

### **What is to stop the credit thief from lifting my freeze?**

A long PIN that will be supplied to you when you freeze it. This is pretty much it so be sure not to lose it. If there is another breach like this while you have the freeze, unfreeze it ASAP, then freeze it again to get a new PIN. Yes, this costs money. It costs less than having your identity stolen. And you might be able to get it back.

TransUnion allows you to set your own PIN, Experian will send it in the mail, Equifax will set it for you and give it to you over the phone after your freeze is initiated. IMPORTANT! Do not hang up until you have it written down! You can make it replay the message over and over. Listen to the automated prompts.

**3) Initiate a Fraud Alert: If you don't do a credit freeze, at least consider placing a Fraud Alert.** As a victim of identity theft, you can contact your local police station, tell them you need to file the report to initiate the appropriate processes. They may not know what you're talking about but they will do it if you explain. Use the following site:

<https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0279-extended-fraud-alerts-and-credit-freezes>

This normally costs money but you're a victim now. This is why you need the police report/Identity Theft Report. This makes it free. This requires that anyone who wants to run your credit is going to have to jump through extra hoops to verify your identity. This a bit laborious but is less work than fighting through identity theft for four years.

### **4) Opt out of prescreened offers of credit while you're at it.**

This incident is probably going to inspire you to get off the grid a bit more. You tired of junk mail? Well here's how you reduce a ton of it:

[888-5OPTOUT \(888-567-8688\)](https://www.optoutprescreen.com/)

Call the number or click the link. Either way will work. This will remain for five years at a time but if you return the signed Permanent Opt-Out Election Form to each credit bureau it will remain forever.

Experian Opt Out  
P.O. Box 919  
Allen, TX 75013

TransUnion Name Removal Option  
P.O. Box 505  
Woodlyn, PA 19094

Equifax, Inc. Options  
P.O. Box 740123  
Atlanta, GA 30374-0123

Innovis Consumer Assistance  
P.O. Box 495  
Pittsburgh, PA 15230-0495

**What is my recourse if I wind up losing money due to being affected by this breach?** You must have proof that you lost money due to this breach. If you did, consider speaking to a lawyer for advice as to what option would best work for you in your situation.

### **Last Steps!**

File your tax return as soon as possible from here on out. With your credit frozen and a fraud alert in place your biggest risk of direct impact is going to come from a fraudulent tax return. Unfortunately, if someone files with your SSN you will not be able to file. You will have to dispute it. Some victims of fraudulent tax filing, have to go through a long battle to fix everything. Log onto MyPay to get your W-2. If your identity is stolen and used this way try to follow the suggested steps on this webpage: <https://turbotax.intuit.com/tax-tools/tax-tips/General-Tax-Tips/Identity-Theft--What-to-Do-if-Someone-Has-Already-Filed-Taxes-Using-Your-Social-Security-Number/INF23035.html> to make fighting this battle a little easier.

The IRS will never contact you by phone or email to verify your identity! However, if you contact them they will be willing to verify over the phone. If you get a call from anyone claiming to be the IRS for this purpose hang up, look up the IRS number, and call them instead.

Here is the IRS official page on the subject. Go to: <https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/tips-for-taxpayers-victims-about-identity-theft-and-tax-returns>

### **Birth Certificates**

If you only have one copy of your birth certificate look up your County of Birth's rules on requesting a new one. This will probably cost about \$20. The birth certificate is one of the end-all-be-all points of our identity. Keep them in locked and fire proof boxes. Worst case scenario for you is having your identity stolen and then having a fire take these documents. Make sure both can't happen at the same time by implanting these measures.

### **Passports**

If you don't have one look into getting a Passport. This will prevent one from being made in your name with your birth certificate in the future, may help you prove your identity if necessary, and you can also travel to Europe, Canada, and Mexico without a visa in most cases.

Passports use various methods for confirming your identity. You'll have to send a 2"x2" photo and a certified original copy of your birth certificate off the State Department to get your Passport. The photo can be done at a UPS Store or CVS or similar places and costs like \$5. The Passport fee itself is closer to \$100. The State Department will send back your birth certificate when they are done with it but I would suggest having more than one original on hand. Photocopies are not good enough for either case.

**For Parents**

You can freeze your child's credit once they have an SSN! They probably don't have an Equifax file unless you've had them apply for banks and credit cards already, but freezing it when they are young is something to consider!