



Alert! Secure your Identity

You may not realize it but your government, which is supposed to protect you, your property and your personal and private information, may inadvertently, through some of its representatives be actually stealing from you or allowing others to do so. You may have heard of identity theft and identity fraud, concerns that have always been associated with private individuals and illegal businesses or the Internet. It has been discovered through various sources that personal information of private individuals have been stolen from government owned and maintained databases for the purpose of obtaining goods and services illegally as well as creating (1) [fake identities for profit](#). Some of these cases of theft have occurred due to neglect or lax security measures and procedures of the government agencies responsible. In other cases, government personnel are involved in the theft, serving as the insider who retrieve the information and use their privileges to create false identities.

Stolen confidential and personal information of individuals are used in various profitable but illegal acts. Once the information is in the hands of these criminal elements, they can use the information to apply for goods and services also offered by the government agencies or private businesses. They get the goods and services but the transactions are under the name of victim of identity theft. An example is applying for social security benefits under someone else's name. Since all the information necessary is available, it is easy to get approval. In some cases, this type of fraud is done with the help of insiders who work for the system. You may not know it, but you might have already availed of a social security benefit that went to somebody else.

They can also create fake identities using the private individual's information, which they can sell to illegal aliens or criminals. For instance, an illegal alien can use another person's social security number to apply for a job or a criminal can get a fake driver's license using another person's driver's license information. Since the original information is legitimate and is found in the government database, the fake identification can pass as an original. Although, in these cases, no direct loss is incurred by the victim of identity theft, it could lead to other problems since someone else is using the victim's identity. The criminal acts of fake driver's license holder could be attributed to the victim instead.

But not all blame should be placed on the identity thief. The government is also very much to blame for these incidents because of poor (1) [database security systems and procedures](#). Any government agencies allow Internet access to databases with confidential information. Although they do have some form of security to prevent unauthorized access, some are not updated or and can easily be hacked. Poorly planned and implemented procedures on maintaining user access and user passwords to the database also make it easy for identity thieves to gain access.

Further, government personnel participation, not neglect, is the means by which the theft is done. In other words, there are cases wherein the thief is actually someone in the government agency where the data resides.

For this reason, there are many groups and individuals opposed to government initiatives on creating a national ID system. Many fear that this will just give identity thieves one central location to get any and all information they need.

Stealing data in digital form is almost impossible to detect. This is the reason why, in most cases, the identity theft is only discovered after the information has already been used to commit a crime. Even in these cases, it usually takes a long time before the crime is traced back to the identity theft. Once your identity is stolen, there is nothing much you can do until it is used and unless you are able to find out about it.



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The only way to stop these forms of crime is prevention. This is done by preventing other people from gaining access to your information by being conscientious as to whom, when, why and how you give your personal information to others. If you already gave personal information to private and public entities in the past, try and back track. Find out how they protect the data you gave them. If it is not necessary for you to leave your data, try removing it so that you have less place where identity thief can get our information. But chances are your information is already in a government database. And we can only hope that they are doing everything they can to prevent other people from stealing it.

- (1) <http://www.homelandstupidity.us/2007/02/07/thieves-target-government-records-for-identity-theft/>
- (2) <http://news.independent.co.uk/uk/politics/article447792.ece>