

Privacy Reminders

9. What is a Fraud Alert and how to activate one?

There are two types of fraud alerts: an **initial** alert, and an **extended** alert.

- **An initial fraud alert stays on your credit report for at least 90 days.** You may ask that an initial fraud alert be placed on your credit report if you suspect you have been, or are about to be, a victim of identity theft. An initial alert is appropriate if your wallet has been stolen or if you have been taken in by a "phishing" scam. With an initial fraud alert, potential creditors must use what the law refers to as "reasonable policies and procedures" to verify your identity before issuing credit in your name. However, the steps potential creditors take to verify your identity may not always alert them that the applicant is not you. When you place an initial fraud alert on your credit report, you're entitled to order one free credit report from each of the three nationwide consumer reporting companies, and, if you ask, only the last four digits of your Social Security Number will appear on your credit reports.
- **An extended fraud alert stays on your credit report for seven years.** You can have an extended alert placed on your credit report if you have been a victim of identity theft and you provide the consumer reporting company with an [Identity Theft Report](#). With an extended fraud alert, potential creditors must actually contact you, or meet with you in person, before they issue you credit. When you place an extended alert on your credit report, you are entitled to two free credit reports within twelve months from each of the three nationwide consumer-reporting companies. In addition, the consumer reporting companies will remove your name from marketing lists for pre-screened credit offers for five years unless you ask them to put your name back on the list before then.
- **Placing a Fraud Alert.** To place either of these alerts on your credit report, or to have them removed, you will be required to provide appropriate proof of your identity: that may include your Social Security Number, name, address and other personal information requested by the consumer reporting company. See below for step by step instructions from the FTC.

| Step by Step: | Notes: | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Contact 1 credit reporting company from the three listed in the columns to the right. | Equifax 1-800-525-6285; www.equifax.com | Experian 1-888-397-3742; www.experian.com | TransUnion 1-800-680-7289; www.transunion.com |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report that you are an identity theft victim. • Ask the company to put a fraud alert on your credit file. • Confirm that the company you call will contact the other 2 companies. <div style="background-color: #e0e0e0; padding: 5px;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ <i>Placing a fraud alert is free. The initial fraud alert stays on your credit report for 90 days.</i> ⇒ <i>Be sure the credit reporting companies have your current contact information so</i> </div> | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Learn about your rights. | The credit reporting company will explain that you can get a free credit report, and other rights you have. | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mark your calendar. | The initial fraud alert stays on your report for 90 days. You can renew it after 90 if you wish to have it continue. | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Update your files. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Record the dates you made calls or sent letters. • Keep copies of letters in your files. | | |

- Depending on the type of fraud alert you place, potential creditors must either contact

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you or take reasonable steps to verify your identity. This may cause some delays if you are trying to obtain credit. You may wish to include a cell phone number, where you can be easily reached in your alert. Remember to keep all contact information in your alert current.

- **What Does a Fraud Alert Not Do?** While a fraud alert can help keep an identity thief from opening new accounts in your name, it is not a solution to all types of identity theft. It will not protect you from an identity thief using your existing credit cards or other accounts. It also will not protect you from an identity thief opening new accounts in your name that do not require a credit check, e.g., a bank account. Remember, if there is identity theft already going on when you place the fraud alert, the fraud alert alone will not stop it. A fraud alert, however, can be extremely useful in stopping identity theft that involves opening a new line of credit.

For more information on protecting yourself from Identity Theft visit the [Federal Trade Commission](#).

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