

What to do if you're a victim of fraud

When you use a credit card, you can be vulnerable to fraud, whether you pay online, over the phone, or even in person at your neighborhood grocery store.

If you think you've been the victim of fraud or a scam, immediately follow these steps. The faster you contact the proper authorities, the more likely you are to minimize the damage a scammer can do to your identity, your credit, and your bank account.

Step 1: Close any affected accounts

Contact the genuine company or organization if you believe you've given sensitive information to an unknown source masquerading as that real company or organization. If you contact the real company immediately, they might be able to lessen the damage to you and others. Then:

- **Speak with the security or fraud department** about any fraudulently accessed or opened accounts at every bank or financial institution you deal with, including credit card companies, utilities, Internet service providers, and other organizations that have your personal information.
- **Follow up** with a letter and save a copy for yourself. When you open new accounts use strong passwords, not passwords such as your mother's maiden name, along with a new account number.

Step 2: Change the passwords on all of your online accounts

When you change your passwords or open new accounts, use strong passwords.

Step 3: Contact the proper authorities

- **File a complaint.**
- **File a report with your local police department.** Get a copy of the police report to notify your bank, credit card company, and other creditors that you are a victim of a crime, not a credit abuser.

Depending on where you live, you might be required to file a report in the jurisdiction where the crime actually took place.

Step 4: Record and save everything

As you complete all these steps to clear up the wrongdoing, always make print copies of documents for yourself, including e-mail messages, written correspondence, and records of telephone calls, and file them somewhere safe.

For telephone or in-person conversations, follow up with dated confirmation letters to the organization, and save a copy for yourself. State in the letter what was covered in the conversation, and list any follow-up items that you or the representative have committed to in the conversation.