



ELDER FINANCIAL SAFETY CENTER

Equifax Data Breach – Tips for Consumers

1. Consider a fraud alert or credit freeze

With a **fraud alert**, a business must try to verify a consumer's identity before extending new credit. Usually that means calling to check if the person is actually at the particular store attempting to get credit. With a **credit freeze**, no one – including the consumer – can access the consumer's credit report to open a new account. If consumers put a credit freeze in place, they'll get a PIN number to use each time they want to freeze, unfreeze, and refreeze their account.

A **fraud alert** lasts for 90 days. If the consumer doesn't take the affirmative step of renewing the fraud alert, it automatically expires after that. Identity theft victims are entitled to an extended fraud alert, which last seven years. In almost all states, a **credit freeze** lasts until the consumer temporarily lifts it or permanently removes it. In a few states, it expires after seven years.

Fraud alerts are free. Depending on the state law, **credit freezes** may involve fees. In most states, they're free for victims of identity theft. For others, they cost about \$5 to \$10 (Texas is \$10) each time the consumer freezes or unfreezes their account with each credit reporting agency.

For a **fraud alert**, consumers can contact any one of the three major credit reporting agencies by phone or online. The law requires that the credit reporting agency notify the other two of the consumer's fraud alert request. Identity theft victims who want an extended fraud alert must mail or upload their Identity Theft Report, which they can create at IdentityTheft.gov. To put a **credit freeze** in place, consumers must contact each of the three credit reporting agencies separately.

Credit freezes are a powerful tool, but it's not a one-size-fits-all thing. If consumers are about to apply for new credit – for example, a mortgage, car loan, or student loan – they should consider the cost and potential hassle of unfreezing and refreezing each time. But for people who won't need new credit anytime soon, a credit freeze may be a good choice.

Transunion

Online: <https://freeze.transunion.com/sf/securityFreeze/landingPage.jsp>

Phone: 1-888-909-8872

Mail: Transunion LLC. P.O. Box 2000 Chester PA, 19016

Equifax

Online: https://www.freeze.equifax.com/Freeze/jsp/SFF_PersonalIDInfo.jsp .

Phone: 1-800-685-1111

Mail: Equifax Security Freeze, P.O. Box 105788, Atlanta, GA 30348

Experian

Online: <https://www.experian.com/ncaonline/freeze>

Phone: 1-888-397-3742 option 2 and then follow prompts for security freeze.

Mail: Experian Security Freeze, P.O. Box 9554, Allen, TX 75013

2. Sign up for Credit Karma's free credit monitoring

Be aware that if you sign up, you will be authorizing Credit Karma to access your credit report. This is the disclaimer:

“By submitting this registration form, I understand that I am providing written instructions in accordance with the Fair Credit Reporting Act and other applicable law for Credit Karma to request and receive information about me from third parties, including but not limited to a copy of my consumer credit report and score from consumer reporting agencies, at any time for so long as I have an active Credit Karma account. I further authorize Credit Karma to retain a copy of my information for use in accordance with Credit Karma's”

This might affect your ability to obtain your own free credit report annually. Also, you're sharing information with another company hoping it will be as secure as Equifax, Experian and Transunion.

3. Be aware of related scams

Sign up for FTC Scam Alerts for the latest information on scams at <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/scam-alerts>. The FTC is reporting that scammers are already using the Equifax data breach to trick consumers into giving out personal information by pretending to be an Equifax representative. Some tips to protect yourself are:

- Never give your personal information to someone who calls you
- Don't trust your caller ID
- Hang up on robocalls
- Report suspicious calls to the Federal Trade Commission