



Equifax, one of our nation's three major credit reporting bureaus, announced last week that it had been breached. Hackers accessed personal information from over 143 million Americans, including their social security numbers, birth dates, addresses, and in some cases, driver's license numbers.

Data breaches pose a potential risk to consumers in the form of identity theft, account takeover and fraud when personal and sensitive information has been exposed. However, simply adopting new safety measures can help keep your information protected.

- Practicing email safety; don't click on links in emails or open attachments unless the email was expected and verified; confirm a message is legitimate by contacting the sender directly.
- Be suspicious of email or phone requests to update personal information.
- Be wary of offers that are too good to be true, require fast action or instill a sense of fear.
- Use security and privacy settings on social network sites and beware of random contacts from strangers.
- Research "apps" before downloading, only download from an "app" store.
- Beware of disaster-related scams where scammers claim to be from legitimate charitable organizations.

Protect Personal and Financial Information by safeguarding credit cards, social security numbers and other personal information. This means only provide sensitive information over secure websites or emails and do not provide personal information or log in to critically sensitive accounts via public computers. Shred bills, bank statements, pre-approved financial solicitations, and other confidential information before discarding them. The Gifford State Bank will have secured shred bins in all the branches through Wednesday, September 27th. Please take advantage of this free service.

Placing a fraud alert on credit reports requires potential creditors to contact the consumer and obtain permission to open new accounts or lines of credit. Law allows consumers to report they are an identity theft victim and file a fraud alert every 90 days; with proper documentation such as a police report, the fraud alert period may be extended up to seven years. Consumers are entitled by law to a free credit report from each of the credit reporting bureaus once a year. The free credit report will show all lines of credit and other obligations, along with other public data. Items to watch for are "new" or "re-opened" accounts and other suspicious activity.

The Bank has had a handful of customers call requesting information on credit freezing. A credit freeze protects against identity theft and the opening of fraudulent accounts with a consumer's personal information. It will block an institution or lender from accessing a report, unless a pre-set PIN is provided to "thaw" the report. A credit freeze does not freeze your bank account. This is specific to your credit report. For additional information please follow the links below.

If you have any other questions please feel free to call or stop by any branch.

- [Credit Freeze-FAQs](#)
- [Equifax Breach FAQ.pdf](#)