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According to a survey done by Javelin Strategy and Research, identity theft is on the rise again with an estimated 12.6 million victims in 2012. That is the second highest total since the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) began keeping statistics on how many people fell victim to identity theft.

Identity theft happens when someone steals your personal information and uses it without your permission. According to the Burleson Police Department's criminal investigations section, in Texas, just being in possession of someone's identifying information, without their consent, with the intent to use it for fraudulent purposes constitutes a crime. Forgery and credit card abuse go hand in hand with the term identity theft.

The police department's community resource officers say you can protect your information by reading your credit reports, bank, credit card and account statements as well as an explanation of medical benefits from your health plan; shred all documents that show personal, financial, and medical information; carry the minimum amount of identifying information you need to conduct your business for that day; don't respond to email, text and phone messages that ask for personal information; pay attention to bills (when they arrive, is the information correct); don't leave identifying information in your vehicle (including mail); create passwords that mix letters, numbers and special characters; if you shop or bank online use websites that protect your financial information with encryption; if you use a public wireless network, don't send information to any website that isn't fully encrypted; use anti-virus and anti-spy software and a firewall on your computer; and set your computer's operating system, web browser and security system to update automatically.

Burleson police detectives say to trust your common sense. If an offer is too good to be true, it probably is. Investigate an offer before you give out personal information. The offer could come from a thief who is posing as an employee of a legitimate company, an email that looks like it came from a legitimate company, or a door-to-door salesman who is asking too many personal questions. Solicitors who approach homes to make personal contact with a resident must register with the Burleson Police Department or with the Department of Public Safety unless they are minors or people conducting political canvassing.

If your identity is stolen, flag your credit reports (Equifax, Experian and TransUnion); order your credit reports; and create an identity theft report. The FTC has an identity theft report form on its website. Burleson's detectives say if you are the victim of identity theft, work with your banks to protect your assets; close any vulnerable accounts; if one account has been compromised, consider changing all account numbers before other accounts are compromised; file a police report and assist law enforcement in obtaining copies of your financial records; continue to monitor your accounts and credit reports closely for several years to determine if your identity is still being used; and, be aware of where you are putting your personal information and who you are giving it to.

Federal Trade Commission Consumer Information:

<http://www.consumer.ftc.gov/features/feature-0014-identity-theft>

Department of Public Safety Identity Theft Information Guide

<http://www.txdps.state.tx.us/DriverLicense/idtheft/idtheft2.htm>

City of Burleson website - www.burlesontx.com/identitytheft

News release - Solicitors are regulated by City and State -

<http://tinyurl.com/6fy9qnn>