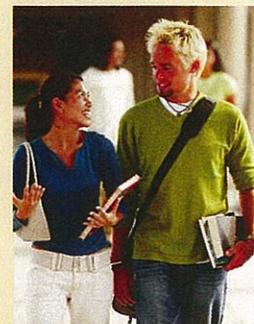# Young Adults Prime Target For Identity Theft

Consumers between the ages of 18 and 29 now make up the largest target group for identity theft, a crime in which someone uses another person's name and personal information to commit fraud. Thieves use the information they steal to open credit accounts, take out loans, get a driver's license, write bad checks, buy a cellular phone, rent an apartment, apply for a job, and even drain the victim's credit union/bank account. The repercussions of identity theft can be very serious, including being denied credit (such as a student loan, cell phone account, or auto financing), refused a job, or even mistakenly arrested for a crime someone else committed. Repairing the damage is time-consuming, stressful, and may take months or even years. Crooks use a wide variety of methods to get the information they need. Some are elaborate ruses to get potential victims to share their confidential information, while others are crimes of opportunity. And, in still other cases, thieves steal confidential information directly from a company or organization that has consumer data in its system.

Perhaps the most unsettling revelation about identity theft is that, in a large percentage of cases, the thief is someone closely connected to the victim — a co-worker, neighbor, roommate, or even a family member.

Though experts and advocates acknowledge that it's impossible to completely prevent identity theft, they all agree that young adults and other consumers can significantly reduce their risk by taking some simple precautions, such as not giving out their Social Security number unnecessarily, keeping an eye on wallets and backpacks, and shredding any document that reveals information a crook could use.

Experts also recommend that all consumers check their credit report every year, free, through www.annualcreditreport.com. Finding out sooner rather than later that someone has hijacked your identity allows you to shift into damage control mode.