Despite identity theft concerns, consumers not taking preventive action

by Bend Weekly News Sources

New research shows identity theft tops consumer concerns about crime

Identity theft remains a top concern for consumers although they are not taking immediate steps to prevent it, according to new data released this week by the National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC). According to an NCPC survey conducted by Harris Interactive, identity theft and credit card fraud top the list of crimes about which adult Americans are extremely concerned.

This finding further supports the latest information from the Federal Trade Commission's Consumer Fraud and Identity Theft Complaint Data report in which identity theft topped the list of consumer complaints for the seventh year in a row. Yet, people with high levels of concern about identity theft are no more knowledgeable about the issue than those who are less concerned (57 percent versus 56 percent of other respondents) about how to prevent it.

Identity theft outranks concern over such crimes as credit card fraud, burglary, and robbery. The NCPC survey of 813 adults, conducted by Harris Interactive in November 2006, also found that

-- Two-thirds of adult females (66 percent) see identity theft as a major problem, compared with 47 percent of adult males.

-- People who feel increasingly vulnerable on the Internet are more likely than their counterparts to see identity theft as a major problem (80 percent of those who feel more vulnerable than a year ago compared with just about half of those who are less afraid or feel unchanged about Internet vulnerability.

-- Fourteen percent of respondents report that they have at sometime in their lives been victims of identity theft -- which represents over 40 million adult Americans.

-- Twenty-four percent of respondents knew someone who has been an ID theft victim.

-- Those who know ID theft victims are significantly more likely to be most concerned about that crime -- 31 percent versus 24 percent of all other adults.

-- People could name a variety of preventive actions that might prove helpful: shredding (destroying) sensitive personal documents, avoiding use of Social Security numbers, taking care not to give out personal information on the phone (including credit card and Social Security numbers), avoiding giving out computer or other passwords,

and refusing to give out personal information via the Web, among others.

-- The African American community appears to be disproportionately victimized by ID theft: 31 percent report being victims compared with 14 percent of the population overall, and 45 percent know family members or close friends who are victims, compared with 25 percent of the general population.

NCPC, a national nonprofit organization known best for its icon McGruff the Crime Dog, has built consumer awareness of ways to prevent ID theft through a series of TV, radio, and print public service advertisements launched in June 2005, along with a consumer handbook for ID theft prevention, available free online.

Handbook: Preventing Identity Theft - A Guide for Consumers

Brochure: Identity Theft

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