

Fraud Alert!

FREEZING YOUR CREDIT FILES

The Bucks County Crimes Against Elders Task Force wants to warn residents and inform them of steps that they can take to protect themselves after the massive Equifax data breach.

What is a credit freeze?

Also known as a security freeze, this tool lets you restrict access to your credit report, which in turn makes it more difficult for identity thieves to open new accounts in your name. That's because most creditors need to see your credit report before they approve a new account. If they can't see your file, they may not extend the credit.

Does a credit freeze affect my credit score?

No. A credit freeze does not affect your credit score.

A credit freeze also **does not**:

- prevent you from getting your free annual credit report
- keep you from opening a new account, applying for a job, renting an apartment, or buying insurance. But if you're doing any of these, you'll need to lift the freeze temporarily, either for a specific time or for a specific party, say, a potential landlord or employer. The cost and lead times to lift a freeze vary, so it's best to check with the credit reporting company in advance.
- prevent a thief from making charges to your existing accounts. You still need to monitor all bank, credit card and insurance statements for fraudulent transactions.

Can anyone see my credit report if it is frozen?

Certain entities still will have access to it.

- your report can be released to your existing creditors or to debt collectors acting on their behalf.
- government agencies may have access in response to a court or administrative order, a subpoena, or a search warrant.

How do I place a freeze on my credit reports?

Contact each of the nationwide credit reporting companies:

- Equifax — 1-800-349-9960 or online at: Freeze.Equifax.com
- Experian — 1-888-397-3742 or online at: Experian.com/Freeze
- TransUnion — 1-888-909-8872 or online at: TransUnion.com/Freeze

You'll need to supply your name, address, date of birth, Social Security number and other personal information.

If you are 65 or older, Pennsylvania law states that you cannot be charged a fee to place or remove a freeze on your credit account. For residents under the age of 65 a freeze will cost \$10.70 for Experian, FREE for Equifax (due to the data breach) and \$10 for TransUnion.

You will also be charged these fee amounts if you want to temporarily lift your credit freeze in order to make purchases on credit such as vehicles, mortgages or even get new credit cards. There is no fee to temporarily lift the credit freeze for victims of identity theft.

Unfortunately there is some expense incurred by residents for this unfortunate incident.

**Pennsylvania Attorney General Shapiro has recently filed legal action against the agencies charging this fee.*

After receiving your freeze request, each credit reporting company will send you a confirmation letter containing a unique PIN (personal identification number) or password.

Keep the PIN or password in a safe place. You will need it if you choose to lift the freeze.

How do I lift a freeze?

In the vast majority of states, a freeze remains in place until you ask the credit reporting company to temporarily

lift it or remove it altogether. A credit reporting company must lift a freeze no later than three business days after getting your request. The cost to lift a freeze varies by state.

If you opt for a **temporary lift** because you are applying for credit or a job, and you can find out which credit reporting company the business will contact for your file, you can save some money by lifting the freeze only through that particular credit bureau.

What’s the difference between a credit freeze and a fraud alert?

- A credit freeze locks down your credit.
- A fraud alert allows creditors to get a copy of your credit report as long as they take steps to verify your identity. For example, if you provide a telephone number, the business must call you to verify whether you are the person making the credit request. Fraud alerts may be effective at stopping someone from opening new credit accounts in your name, but they may not prevent the misuse of your existing accounts. You still need to monitor all bank, credit card and insurance statements for fraudulent transactions.

Three types of fraud alerts are available:

- **Initial Fraud Alert.** If you're concerned about identity theft, but haven't yet become a victim, this fraud alert will protect your credit from unverified access for at least 90 days. You may want to place a fraud alert on your file if your wallet, Social Security card, or other personal, financial or account information are lost or stolen.
- **Extended Fraud Alert.** For victims of identity theft an extended fraud alert will protect your credit for 7 yrs.
- **Active Duty Military Alert.** For those in the military who want to protect their credit while deployed, this fraud alert lasts for one year.

To place a fraud alert on your credit reports, contact one of the nationwide credit reporting companies.

A fraud alert is FREE. The company you call must tell the other credit reporting companies; they, in turn, will place an alert on their versions of your report.

If you need instructions on how to mail in your request to freeze your credit file you can request a copy of Bucks County Consumer Protection’s “Freezing Your Credit File” brochure, email your request to ConsumerProtection@BucksCounty.org or visit our website at:

www.BucksCounty.org/ConsumerProtection click on Consumer Tips and then “How to Freeze Your Credit”

If you do not have access to a computer, call 215-348-6060 and provide your name and mailing address so that we may send you a copy.

Monthly Fraud Alerts courtesy of...

[Bucks County Crimes Against Older Adults Task Force](http://www.crimesagainstolderadultsbucks.org)

Bucks County District Attorney’s Office

215-348-6344

Bucks County Area Agency on Aging

215-348-0510

Bucks County Coroner’s Office

215-348-3852

Network of Victim Assistance (NOVA)

1-800-675-6900

A Woman’s Place (AWP)

1-800-220-8116

Bucks County Office of Consumer Protection

215-348-6060

Bucks County Register of Wills

215-348-6265

www.crimesagainstolderadultsbucks.org

24 - HOUR HOTLINE: 1-800-490-8505