

## **Social Security Column**

### **SOME TRICKS CAN BE HORRIFYING TO YOUR RECORD**

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You'll probably be passing out treats to costumed hobgoblins and ghosts in your neighborhood this Halloween night. But be cautious that you're not tricked by a different kind of trickster looking for a handout, such as your personal information.

You should always safeguard your personal information such as date of birth, mother's maiden name, and your Social Security number. Why? Because it's that type of information identity thieves are after.

You may think you're safe simply by not carrying your Social Security card with you and not providing your personal information over the Internet or by e-mail. But scam artists have become tricky. Never reply to an e-mail claiming to be from Social Security and asking for your Social Security number or personal information.

Identity theft is one of the fastest-growing crimes in America. If you think you've been the victim of an identity thief, you should contact the Federal Trade Commission at [www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/microsites/idtheft](http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/microsites/idtheft). Or you can call 1-877-IDTHEFT (1-877-438-4338); TTY 1-866-653-4261.

Another trick: Some people who receive Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits are victimized by misleading advertisers. Often, these companies offer Social Security services for a fee, even though the same services are available directly from Social Security free of charge. These services include getting a:

- Corrected Social Security card showing a bride's married name;
- Social Security card to replace a lost card; and

- Social Security number for a child.

If you receive or see what you believe is misleading advertising for Social Security services, send the complete mailing, including the envelope, to: Office of the Inspector General, Fraud Hotline, Social Security Administration, P.O. Box 17768, Baltimore, MD 21235. If you see misleading advertising online, you can report this information online at [www.socialsecurity.gov/oig/guidelin.htm](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/oig/guidelin.htm). Also, advise your State's attorney general or consumer affairs office and the Better Business Bureau.

Learn more about identity theft at [www.socialsecurity.gov/pubs/10064.html](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/pubs/10064.html). Read about misleading advertising at [www.socialsecurity.gov/pubs/10005.html](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/pubs/10005.html).

Enjoy the treats of the season, but be cautious of tricksters trying to steal more than a sack of candy. The results of becoming the victim of identity theft can be horrifying. Protect your identifying information.

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