

Hi everyone, Jerry Manor here. Today on SeaComm Money Matters, the NPD breach.

National Public Data (NPD) a data broker company based in Coral Springs, Florida disclosed a massive data breach in August, which involved the Social Security numbers of nearly every American.

NPD provides background check services to a variety of clients -- including employers, private investigators and other businesses that require verification of individuals' backgrounds.

Crooks can potentially use the stolen personal information for a variety of malicious purposes, like opening fraudulent credit cards in victim's names, apply for loans, access financial account, and basically steal someone's identity.

There are several things people can do to protect against this data breach and others like it.

Closely monitor financial accounts and promptly contact the financial institution if any unauthorized activity is observed.

Get your credit report by contact the three U.S. credit reporting agencies -- Equifax, Experian and TransUnion -- to obtain a free credit report from each agency. Go to annualcreditreport.com or call 1.877.322.8228. You can place a free fraud alert on your credit file. This can be done by contacting any one of the three major credit bureaus, Experian at Experian.com, Equifax at Equifax.com and Transunion at transunion.com. A fraud alert will make it harder for someone to open a new credit account in your name. A business must verify your identity before it issues new credit in your name. A fraud alert lasts one year. After a year, you can renew it. You don't have to contact all three. The credit bureau you contact must tell the other two to place a fraud alert on your credit report. While you are there you can also place a credit freeze on your account. Anyone can freeze their credit report, even if their identity has not been stolen.

A credit freeze restricts access to your credit report, which means you — or others — won't be able to open a new credit account while the freeze is in place. You can temporarily lift the credit freeze if you need to apply for new credit. When the freeze is in place, you will still be able to do things like apply for a job, rent an apartment, or buy insurance without lifting or removing it. A credit freeze lasts until you remove it and it's free but you must contact each of the three credit agencies Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion.

You can also place an extended fraud alert on your credit files. This is only available to people who have had their identity stolen and completed an FTC identity theft report at IdentityTheft.gov or filed a police report. Like a fraud alert, an extended fraud alert will make it harder for someone to open a new credit account in your name. A business must contact you before it issues new credit in your name.

When you place an extended fraud alert on your credit report, you can get a free copy of your credit report from each of the three credit bureaus twice within one year from when you place the alert, which means you could review your credit report six times in a year.

In addition, the credit bureaus will take you off their marketing lists for unsolicited credit and insurance offers for five years, unless you ask them not to. An extended fraud alert lasts seven years and it's free.

Contact Equifax, Experian or TransUnion. You don't have to contact all three. The credit bureau you contact must tell the other two to place an extended fraud alert on your credit report. Another thing you always want to do is monitor all your accounts and report anything suspicious.

Thanks for listening and have a great weekend!