

ID thieves target dozen Amity residents

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When Jeffrey E. Smith got the first call, he didn't bat an eye.

But as resident after resident from Buckhead Lane filed identification theft reports, the Amity Township police detective knew something unusual was going on.

"This is definitely a first," Smith said. "We kept getting more and more of these coming in from the same street filing these reports."

Altogether, Smith received complaints from 11 residents from Buckhead Lane and one from nearby Anvil Drive in the past month.

By using each victim's name, date of birth, Social Security number and address, individuals throughout the country were able to open charge accounts at stores from New Jersey to California.

The accounts at stores such as Toys R Us, Kohl's and Home Depot were opened from late July to early August, but the victims only discovered the fraud when the bills arrived a month later.

One victim's identification was used to open a checking account at a TD Bank in New Jersey, Smith said.

Smith estimated that a total of about \$20,000 was taken fraudulently in the 12 reported cases.

"People started getting credit cards in the mail that they didn't open up, bills in the mail for accounts they didn't open up," Smith said.

The detective said most of the victims will not be held responsible for the bills, since it is a clear case of fraud, but it will stick with them.

As a onetime victim himself, Smith knows first hand. He said his old identity theft case still comes up in his credit report.

He said the theft also creates a larger effect on the general public.

"In the long run, everyone loses," Smith said. "The stores end up eating the costs of it and the consumers end up paying for it later on down the road when the stores raise their rates."

At this point, since the case involves multiple victims with accounts in multiple states, Smith said the Secret Service is taking over the investigation and the Amity Township police department will continue to gather related information.

Smith will be meeting with federal investigators this week. He said there are similar identity-theft patterns in other areas of the state where residents from the same street are being hit.

He advised residents, especially those living in the area, to check their credit reports to see if there is anything listed that they do not recognize.

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