

# What is a fraud alert?

There are two types of fraud alerts: an initial alert, and an extended alert.

An initial fraud alert stays on your credit report for at least 90 days. You may ask that an initial fraud alert be placed on your credit report if you suspect you have been, or are about to be, a victim of identity theft. An initial alert is appropriate if your wallet has been stolen or if you've been taken in by a "phishing" scam. With an initial fraud alert, potential creditors must use what the law refers to as "reasonable policies and procedures" to verify your identity before issuing credit in your name. However, the steps potential creditors take to verify your identity may not always alert them that the applicant is not you. When you place an initial fraud alert on your credit report, you're entitled to order one free credit report from each of the three nationwide consumer reporting companies, and, if you ask, only the last four digits of your Social Security number will appear on your credit reports.

An extended fraud alert stays on your credit report for seven years. You can have an extended alert placed on your credit report if you've been a victim of identity theft and you provide the consumer reporting company with an Identity Theft Report. An automated Identity Theft Report, such as the printed ID Theft Complaint available from this Web site, should be sufficient to obtain an extended fraud alert. With an extended fraud alert, potential creditors must actually contact you, or meet with you in person, before they issue you credit. When you place an extended alert on your credit report, you're entitled to two free credit reports within twelve months from each of the three nationwide consumer reporting companies. In addition, the consumer reporting companies will remove your name from marketing lists for pre-screened credit offers for five years unless you ask them to put your name back on the list before then. To place either of these alerts on your credit report, or to have them removed, you will be required to provide appropriate proof of your identity: that may include your Social Security number, name, address and other personal information requested by the consumer reporting company.

As mentioned, depending on the type of fraud alert you place, potential creditors must either contact you or take reasonable steps to verify your identity. This may cause some delays if you're trying to obtain credit. To compensate for possible delays, you may wish to include a cell phone number, where you can be reached easily, in your alert. Remember to keep all contact information in your alert current.