

SECURITY FREEZE INFORMATION

The state of **Georgia** has passed a security freeze law that will go into effect on August 1, 2008. Until then, consumers can get security freezes from the three major credit bureaus (Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion), which provide this service voluntarily. In order to get a security freeze, you must contact all three bureaus and pay a fee to each, where applicable. For victims of identity theft, there are no fees. For all others, there is a \$10 fee every time you place, temporarily lift, or remove a security freeze.

Effective August 1, 2008, Georgia's new law will require consumer reporting agencies to offer consumers the opportunity to get a security freeze. Consumers can request a security freeze by writing to all three major credit bureaus.

Under the Georgia law, the consumer reporting agency is not allowed to charge any fees to victims of identity theft for placing, removing or temporarily lifting a security freeze on a credit report. To prove you are a victim, you must also send a valid copy of a police report, investigative report, or a complaint to a law enforcement agency about unlawful use of your personal information by another person. There are no placement fees for seniors 65 or older.

Otherwise, you must pay a charge of \$3 for each placing or temporary lifting of a security freeze. If you lose your PIN, you may be charged up to \$5 for a replacement. A security freeze shall prohibit, with certain specific exceptions, the consumer reporting agency from releasing the consumer's credit report or any information from it without the express authorization of the consumer.

To obtain more detailed information on how to place a security freeze on your credit reports, see below.

HOW TO "FREEZE" YOUR CREDIT FILES

A security freeze means that your file cannot be shared with potential creditors. A security freeze can help prevent identity theft. Most businesses will not open credit accounts without first checking a consumer's credit history. If your credit files are frozen, even someone who has your name and Social Security number probably would not be able to obtain credit in your name.

How do I place a security freeze?

To place a freeze in Georgia, you must write to each of the three major credit bureaus. Currently, the credit bureaus charge \$3 to place a freeze. Starting August 1, 2008, the credit bureaus cannot charge more than \$3 to place a security freeze. If you are a senior 65 or older, there is no fee to place a security freeze. If you provide proof that you are a victim of identity theft, there is no fee.

If you want the fee waiver as an identity theft victim, you must provide a copy of your police report, investigative report or a complaint to a law enforcement agency.

Write to all three addresses below and include the information that follows:

Equifax Security Freeze

P.O. Box 105788
Atlanta, GA 30348

Experian Security Freeze

P.O. Box 9554
Allen, TX 75013

Trans Union Security Freeze

P.O. Box 6790
Fullerton, CA 92834-6790

For each, you must:

- Send a letter by regular or certified mail;
- If you are a victim of identity theft, you must include a copy of either the police report, investigative report, or complaint to a law enforcement agency concerning identity theft;
- Provide your full name (including middle initial as well as Jr., Sr., II, III, etc.)
- Provide any name you previously used;
- Provide current and recent full addresses, including street address, apartment number, city, state and zip code;
- Provide your Social Security number;
- Provide your date of birth.
- Send a photocopy of a government issued identification card (state driver's license or ID card, military identification, etc.)
- If applicable, include payment by check, money order or credit card (Visa, Master Card, American Express or Discover cards only.)

How long does it take for a security freeze to be in effect?

After three (3) business days from receiving your letter, the consumer reporting agencies listed above will place a freeze on credit reports to potential creditors. Starting August 1,

2008, you may make a request by telephone or Internet. After ten (10) business days, they must send you a confirmation letter containing a unique PIN (personal identification number) or password. Keep this PIN or password in a safe place.

Can I open new credit accounts if my files are frozen?

Yes. You can have a security freeze lifted for a temporary period of time.

Before July 1, 2008, consumers must pay \$10 to lift a security freeze.

Starting August 1, 2008, there is a \$3 charge for temporarily lifting the security freeze for a specific period of time. The steps to do so are as follows:

- Contact the consumer reporting agencies above.
- The manner by which you contact them is determined by them, but it may be by way of telephone, fax or over the Internet or by mail. Starting August 1, 2008, the consumer reporting agency must offer you an Internet based method or toll-free number to request a temporary lift of the freeze;
- You must provide proper identification;
- You must provide your unique PIN or password;
- You must include during what time period your credit report will be accessible (for example August 1 to August 5)

How long does it take for a security freeze to be lifted?

Credit bureaus must lift a freeze no later than three (3) business days from receiving your request. However, starting August 1, 2008, a credit bureau must temporarily lift a security freeze under reasonable circumstances within fifteen (15) minutes if the request is received via the electronic method selected by the agency between 6:00am and 9:30pm Mountain time.

What will a new creditor who requests my file see if it is frozen?

A creditor will see a message or a code indicating the file is frozen.

Can a new creditor get my credit score if my file is frozen?

No. A creditor who requests your file from one of the three credit bureaus will only get a message or a code indicating that the file is frozen.

Can I order my own credit report if my file is frozen?

Yes.

Can anyone see my credit file if it is frozen?

When you have a security freeze on your credit file, certain entities still have access to it so long as they use the information for “other than credit related purposes.” Your report can still be released to your existing creditors or to collection agencies acting on their own behalf. They can use it to review or collect on your account. Government agencies may also have access in response to a court or administrative order, a subpoena, or a search warrant.

Do I have to freeze my file with all three credit bureaus?

Yes. Different credit issuers may use different credit bureaus. If you want to stop your credit file from being viewed, you must freeze it with Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion.

If more than one person in my household wants to request a security freeze, do we each have to request a separate security freeze?

Yes. Because every individual consumer has his or her own credit history and file, each individual must make his or her own request to place, lift or remove a security freeze. Furthermore, each individual should send make a separate request and pay any applicable fee.

Will a freeze lower my credit score?

No.

Can an employer do a background check on my credit file?

Yes. There is an exemption for non-credit related use of your credit.

Does freezing my file mean that I won't receive pre-approved credit offers?

No. You can stop the pre-approved credit offers by calling 888-5OPTOUT (888-567-8688). Or you can do this online at www.optoutprescreen.com. This will stop most of the offers, the ones that go through the credit bureaus. It's good for five years or you can make it permanent.

What law requires security freezes?

The Georgia security freeze bill is HB 130.

THIS FACT SHEET IS FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES AND SHOULD NOT BE CONSTRUED AS LEGAL ADVICE. FOR LEGAL ADVICE, YOU MUST CONSULT YOUR OWN ATTORNEY.

