

Security Breaches and Identity Theft

The Board of Tax Practitioners would like to encourage practitioners and consumers to take precautionary measures in avoiding a security breach and the possibility of identity theft.

Earlier this year a Portland area tax preparation office was burglarized. The target of the theft was the offices' twelve computers and two of their servers. The servers contained backup tax data for 21,839 clients from the company's branch offices. Both servers were recovered by the police and it was determined that none of the client's personal information had been accessed. The computers were not recovered but they did not contain any of the client's personal data.

The office acted responsibly by sending out a letter within days after the theft, notifying all their clients to be aware of possible unauthorized activity on their credit reports and to contact a credit bureau and place a fraud alert on their credit file. After the servers were recovered a second letter was sent out to the client's giving them an update and letting them know that none of their personal information had been accessed.

The office has an alarm system that was activated, and the police responded in less than ten minutes. However the thieves were still successful. The office has now taken more steps to secure client information by having bars installed on the windows which is how the thieves broke into the building.

Although there are many more precautions that individuals can take to protect themselves against a security breach/identity theft, should you fall victim, contact the fraud department of any of the following credit bureau's to report a fraud alert:

- A) Equifax: (800) 525-6285
- B) Experian: (888) 397-3742
- C) Transunion: (800) 680-7289

You do not need to contact more than one of the credit bureau's listed above as the bureau you notified will notify the other two bureaus automatically upon confirmation of your credit fraud. Once you have reported a fraud alert, creditor's **must** contact you prior to making any changes to your existing accounts, charges for unusual purchases/purchases in excessive amounts and/or opening any new accounts.