

to help consumers avoid or resolve identity theft problems. In addition to advising consumers, counselors enter consumer complaint information into the centralized Theft Data Clearinghouse used to aid law enforcement and prevent identity theft.

The Identity Theft hotline has been in operation since November 1999, 844 435 4358. 1-844-435-4358

About Identity Theft in California

We are already seeing the fruits of collecting and analyzing identity theft complaint single repository. The basic complaint data show that the most common forms of identity theft reported by California consumers during the first nine months of operation were:

- *Credit Card Fraud* - Approximately 50% of consumers reported credit card fraud - *i.e.*, a credit card account opened in their name or a "takeover" of their existing credit card account;
- *Communications Services* - Approximately 28% reported that the identity thief opened up telephone, cellular or other utility service in their name;
- *Bank Fraud* - Approximately 17% reported that a checking or savings account been opened in their name, and/or that fraudulent checks had been written;
- *Fraudulent Loans* - Approximately 10% reported that the identity thief obtained a loan, such as a car loan, in their name; and
- *Government Documents or Benefits* - Approximately 8% of consumers reported that the identity thief had obtained government documents or benefits (suc

total monetary loss of nearly \$18 million.

Consumers also report the harm to their reputation or daily life. The most common monetary harm reported by consumers is damage to their credit report through delinquent or inaccurate information. Forty-nine percent of California consumers reported that they were harmed in this manner. This negative credit information leads to the other problems most commonly reported by victims, including loan denials, bounced checks, and rejection of credit cards. Identity theft victims also report repeated contacts by debt collectors for the bad debt incurred by the identity thief. Many consumers report that they have to spend significant amounts of time resolving these problems.

industry and individual companies to develop better fraud prevention practices and consumer assistance techniques. To that end, the Commission will convene a working group for industry, consumer groups, the public and law enforcement on Identity Theft victim

10. 15 U.S.C. § 1601 *et seq.*