



## California Senior Legal Hotline

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### SENIOR LEGAL FACT SHEET

## How – and when – to ‘freeze’ your credit file

### ▶ **What is a security credit freeze?**

A security freeze prevents anyone from opening new credit accounts in your name by making your credit file off limits to prospective lenders or other creditors. There is no charge to you if you believe you are a victim of ID theft and have made a police report.

### ▶ **How does a security freeze keep crooks from getting credit in my name?**

When you apply for a loan or credit, the bank or other institution requests a credit report for you from one of the of the three major reporting agencies (see below). A freeze blocks these agencies from providing a report to potential lenders or creditors unless you give your specific permission.

### ▶ **Is a security credit freeze a good idea?**

It depends. You should weigh the pros and cons in light of your particular circumstances.

PROS: A security freeze can be a good way to protect yourself against identity theft if you have reason to believe that someone who shouldn't have received your Social Security number, address and/or other personal information, and might want to get a loan or credit by pretending to be you. A freeze will help stop crooks from opening new accounts in your name; and it doesn't prevent you from getting new credit or other services when you truly want them. Nor does it affect your credit score.

CONS: A freeze may cost money, and it can be inconvenient. It may take up to three business days to be lifted at your request, so any legitimate application or transaction that requires a review of your credit report or score may be delayed.

### ▶ **How to initiate a credit freeze**

First, be sure to make a report to local law enforcement if you believe you are a victim of ID theft.

Don't hesitate to seek legal advice on whether it's necessary in your situation. Then, if you want to

protect yourself by freezing your credit, contact each of the credit bureaus. Exact requirements change; you can obtain current information from their web sites or by phone (box above).

[www.equifax.com](http://www.equifax.com) ❖ 800 685-1111  
[www.transunion.com](http://www.transunion.com) ❖ 888 909-8872  
[www.experian.com](http://www.experian.com) ❖ 888 397-3742

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**If you are over 60 in California, you can get free advice by phone from the California Senior Legal Hotline about freezing credit, preventing identity theft – and almost any other legal issue. Call Mon.-Fri. 9 to 12 and 1 to 4, until 7 p.m. Thursdays. Or send a question by e-mail from [www.seniorlegalhotline.org](http://www.seniorlegalhotline.org).**

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