



Fighting Back Against Identity Theft Federal Trade Commission www.ftc.gov

What is a credit freeze?

Many states have laws that let consumers “freeze” their credit – in other words, letting a consumer restrict access to his or her credit report. If you place a credit freeze, potential creditors and other third parties will not be able to get access to your credit report unless you temporarily lift the freeze. This means that it’s unlikely that an identity thief would be able to open a new account in your name. Placing a credit freeze does not affect your credit score – nor does it keep you from getting your free [annual credit report](#), or from buying your credit report or score.

Credit freeze laws vary from state to state. In some states, anyone can freeze their credit file, while in other states, only identity theft victims can. The cost of placing, temporarily lifting, and removing a credit freeze also varies. Many states make credit freezes free for identity theft victims, while other consumers pay a fee – typically \$10. It’s also important to know that these costs are for each of the credit reporting agencies. If you want to freeze your credit, it would mean placing the freeze with each of three credit reporting agencies, and paying the fee to each one.

You can find more information about credit freeze laws specific to your state by clicking [here](#), including information on how to place one.

Who can access my credit report if I place a credit freeze?

If you place a credit freeze, you will continue to have access to your free [annual credit report](#). You’ll also be able to buy your credit report and credit score even after placing a credit freeze. Companies that you do business with will still have access to your credit report – for example, your mortgage, credit card, or cell phone company – as would collection agencies that are working for one of those companies. Companies will also still be able to offer you prescreened credit. Those are the credit offers you receive in the mail that you have not applied for. Additionally, in some states, potential employers, insurance companies, landlords, and other non-creditors can still get access to your credit report with a credit freeze in place.

Can I temporarily lift my credit freeze if I need to let someone check my credit report?

If you want to apply for a loan or credit card, or otherwise need to give someone access to your credit report and that person is not covered by an exception to the credit freeze law, you would need to temporarily lift the credit freeze.

You would do that by using a PIN that each credit reporting agency would send once you placed the credit freeze. In most states, you’d have to pay a fee to lift the credit freeze. [Most states](#) currently give the credit reporting agencies three days to lift the credit freeze. This might keep you from getting “instant” credit, which may be something to weigh when considering a credit freeze.



What does a credit freeze *not* do?

While a credit freeze can help keep an identity thief from opening most new accounts in your name, it's not a solution to all types of identity theft. It will not protect you, for example, from an identity thief who uses your existing credit cards or other accounts. There are also new accounts, such as telephone, wireless, and bank accounts, which an ID thief could open without a credit check. In addition, some creditors might open an account without first getting your credit report. And, if there's identity theft already going on when you place the credit freeze, the freeze itself won't be able to stop it. While a credit freeze may not protect you in these kinds of cases, it can protect you from the vast majority of identity theft that involves opening a new line of credit.

What's the difference between a credit freeze and a fraud alert?

A fraud alert is another tool for people who've had their ID stolen – or who suspect it may have been stolen. With a fraud alert in place, businesses may still check your credit report. Depending on whether you place an initial 90-day fraud alert or an extended fraud alert, potential creditors must either contact you or 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.

A credit freeze, on the other hand, will prevent potential creditors and other third parties from accessing your credit report at all, unless you lift the freeze or already have a relationship with the company. Some consumers use credit freezes because they feel they give more protection. As with credit freezes, fraud alerts are mainly effective against new credit accounts being opened in your name, but will likely not stop thieves from using your existing accounts, or opening new accounts such as new telephone or wireless accounts, where credit is often not checked. Also, only people who've had their ID stolen – or who suspect it may have been stolen, may place fraud alerts. In some states, anyone can place a credit freeze.