

# Essential Tips for Preventing Check Fraud

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Fortunately, there are steps you can take to help reduce your risk of getting taken advantage of by someone engaging in a mail theft-related check fraud scheme. Here are some tips to keep in mind to help protect yourself from check fraud:

- Use online banking to pay bills whenever possible.
- Sign up for direct deposit of paychecks and other benefits.
- Use certified mail or delivery service with tracking for important checks.
- Monitor bank accounts and credit reports regularly for signs of fraud.
- Report lost or stolen checks immediately to the bank or credit union.
- Place a “stop payment” order on a check if it’s lost or stolen.
- Mail checks at the blue postal boxes during normal mail pickup hours.
- Use envelopes that are not transparent and seal them securely.
- Do not write “payment enclosed” or “do not bend” on the envelope to deter tampering.
- Make sure your checks are endorsed by your financial institution and incorporate security features like watermarks, heat-sensitive ink, or special designs that help combat counterfeiting and alteration.
- Store your checks, deposit slips, bank statements, and canceled checks in a secure and locked location. Don’t leave checks in an unlocked car or other unsecured location.
- Reconcile your bank statement within 30 days of receipt in order to detect any irregularities. Otherwise, you may become liable for any losses due to check fraud.
- Never give your account number to people you do not know, especially over the telephone. Be particularly aware of unsolicited phone sales. Fraud artists can use your account without your authorization, and you may end up being responsible.
- Unless needed for tax purposes, destroy old, canceled checks, account statements, deposit tickets, and ATM receipts (they also frequently have your account number and worse yet, your account balance). The personal information on it may help someone impersonate you and take money from your account.
- When you receive your check order, make sure all of the checks are there, and that none are missing. Report missing checks to your bank at once. Should you fail to receive your order by mail, alert your bank. Checks could have been stolen from the mailbox or lost in transit.

- If your home is burglarized, check your supply of checks to determine if any have been stolen. Look closely, because thieves will sometimes take only one or two checks from the middle or back of the book. The longer it takes to detect any of your checks have been taken, the more time the criminal has to use them successfully.
- If someone pays you with a cashier's check, have them accompany you to the bank to cash it. If at all possible, only accept a check during normal business hours so you can verify whether it is legitimate. Make sure you obtain identification information from the individual.
- Do not mail bills from your mailbox at night. It is a favorite location from which a criminal can gain possession of your check with the intent to defraud you. Criminals will remove a check from your mailbox and either endorse it using bogus identification, photocopy and cash it repeatedly, scan and alter the check, or chemically alter it. The Post Office is the best location from which to send your bill payment.
- Limit the amount of personal information on your check. For example, do not include your Social Security, driver's license, or telephone numbers on your check. A criminal can use this information to literally steal your identity by applying for a credit card or loan in your name or even opening a new checking account.
- Don't leave blank spaces on the payee and amount lines.
- The type of pen you use makes a difference. Most ballpoint and marker inks are dye based, meaning that the pigments are dissolved in the ink. But, based on ink security studies, gel pens, like the Uniball 207 uses gel ink that contains tiny particles of color that are trapped into the paper, making check washing a lot more difficult.
- Don't write your credit card number on the check.
- Use your own pre-printed deposit slips, and make sure the account number on your slip is correct. Thieves occasionally alter deposit slips in the hope you won't notice, and the money goes into their account.
- Don't make a check payable to cash. If lost or stolen, the check can be cashed by anyone.
- Never endorse a check until you are ready to cash or deposit it. The information can be altered if it is lost or stolen.

With a little caution and know-how, you can avoid becoming the victim of a check fraud scam.

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