

HOW TO “FREEZE” YOUR CREDIT FILES

IN GENERAL.—Section 605A of the Fair Credit Reporting Act (15 U.S.C. 1681c–1) now grants a national "security freeze" on your credit file. A security freeze means that your file and credit score cannot be shared with potential creditors. A security freeze can help new accounts from being opened using your personal information without your permission. Most businesses will not open credit accounts without first checking a consumer's credit history. If your credit files are frozen, even someone who has your name and social security number would probably not be able to get credit in your name.

How do I place a security freeze?

To place a freeze, you must contact each of the three credit bureaus. You can request the freeze by phone, online or by mail. See the attached sample letters for addresses and what information to include should you choose or need to freeze your files via mail.

Equifax- 1-800-349-9960

Experian- 1-888-397-3742

TransUnion- 1-888-909-8872

Here are the freeze web pages for the credit bureaus. Note: If these links do not work, search "security freeze" on the credit bureau web sites.

<https://www.freeze.equifax.com>

<https://www.experian.com/freeze/center.html>

<https://www.transunion.com/credit-freeze/place-credit-freeze>

Starting September 21, 2018, you can freeze and unfreeze your credit file for free. You also can get a free freeze for your children who are under 16. And if you are someone's guardian, conservator or have a valid power of attorney, you can get a free freeze for that person, too.

Can I open new credit accounts if my files are frozen?

Yes. If you want to open a new credit account or get a new loan, you can lift the freeze on your credit files. You can lift it for a period of time, or you can lift it for a specific creditor. After you contact the credit bureaus asking for the freeze, the credit bureau will send you a Personal Identification Number (PIN) or ask you to create an account allowing you to freeze and unfreeze you credit online. You will also get instructions on how to lift the freeze. The credit bureaus must lift your freeze within three days if you make the request in writing. If you make the request online, it is usually immediate.

What is the difference between a fraud alert and a freeze?

A fraud alert is a special message on the report that a credit issuer receives when checking a consumer's credit rating. (But they can still see your history and score) It tells the credit issuer that there may be fraud involved on the account and to call a phone number you assigned to the fraud alert. A fraud alert can help protect you against identity theft, but it is only as good as the merchant who views it. It will not stop you from using your existing credit cards or other accounts. A security freeze means that your credit file cannot be seen by potential creditors, insurance companies, or employers doing background checks – unless you give your consent. (Unfreeze your credit) Most businesses will not open credit accounts without first checking a consumer's credit history.

How long does it take for a security freeze to be in effect?

Credit bureaus must place the freeze no later than three business days after receiving your written request. When you place a freeze online, it is usually immediate.

How long does it take to lift a security freeze?

Credit bureaus must lift a freeze no later than three business days after receiving your request written request. It is typically immediate or when you designate when done online.

What will a creditor who requests my file see if it is frozen?

A creditor will see a message or a code indicating that the file is frozen.

Can a creditor get my credit score if my file is frozen?

No. A creditor who requests your file from one of the three credit bureaus will only get a message or a code indicating that the file is frozen.

Can I still get my free annual credit report if my file is frozen?

Yes. To order your free annual credit reports go to www.annualcreditreport.com.

Can anyone see my credit file if it is frozen?

When you have a security freeze on your credit file, certain entities still have access to it. Your report can still be released to your existing creditors or to collection agencies acting on their behalf. They can use it to review or collect on your account. Other creditors may

also use your information to make offers of credit – unless you opt out of receiving such offers. See below for how to opt out of pre-approved credit offers. Government agencies may have access for collecting child support payments or taxes or for investigating Medi-Cal fraud. Government agencies may also have access in response to a court or administrative order, a subpoena, or a search warrant.

Do I have to freeze my file with all three credit bureaus?

Yes. Different credit issuers may use different credit bureaus. If you want to stop your credit file from being viewed, you need to freeze it with Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion.

Will a freeze lower my credit score?

No.

Can an employer do a background check on me if I have a freeze on my credit file?

No. You would have to lift the freeze to allow a background check or to apply for insurance, just as you would to apply for credit. The process for lifting the freeze is described above. You can ask which bureau the employer checks credit with and only lift with that bureau.

Does freezing my file mean that I won't receive pre-approved credit offers?

No. You can stop the pre-approved credit offers by calling 888-5OPTOUT (567-8688). Or you can do this online at www.optoutprescreen.com. This will stop most of the offers, the ones that go through the credit bureaus. It's good for five years or you can make it permanent.

Does my spouse's file have to be frozen, too?

Yes. Both spouses must freeze their separate credit files, via separate requests, in order to get the benefit.