



Sioux Falls Session on Identity Theft Frightens and Educates

By Robert Wilson

What would it cost you in time and money if your identity was stolen? The answer is more than 600 hours and almost \$1,500. Those are the cold hard facts according to an identity theft expert who stopped in Sioux Falls today.

"It really opened my eyes up on a personal level of how vulnerable I am," Judi Hedrick said.

She's ultimately in charge of all the credit card transaction for the Ramkota Companies. But the information presented by identity theft expert Bill Walker was scary enough to make Judi and the rest of people in this room think twice about both their professional and personal information.

"Your social security number is usually the most sought after number out there, and if they can get that social security number, they can go on search engines on the internet and then they can find you, and they can establish credit." Walker told the crowd.

More than 9 million people a year, or 1 every three and a-half seconds become victims of identity theft.

85% of people who discover they are victims, learn of the crime by having credit denied or notification by the police or collection agencies. Besides protecting your Social Security Number and other personal information, there are several things you can do to protect yourself.

They include, monitoring your credit report, guarding your trash that has personal information, and paying attention to billing cycles. If a bill doesn't come on time, it could be an indication of a problem.

After all the information, Judi says she's on the right track. She just needs to keep going.

"I need to kind of keep reiterating to my employees that identity theft is an actual need that we need to be careful of," she said.

Walker says identity thieves are now also going after children. He says that's especially troubling because credit bureaus can't reveal information about anyone under 18.

It means an identity thief can use your child's name and Social Security Number, and you may never know it until they turn 18.