



## Some employers offer ID theft coverage

By Stephanie Armour, USA TODAY

With identity theft becoming epidemic, some employers are beginning to offer a unique employee benefit: identity theft protection.

Employers are buying policies that help employees who have their identities stolen or that help guard against such theft. The actual benefits might vary, but they include credit monitoring, case manager help. Consumers filed 246,570 ID theft complaints in 2004, up 52% from 2002, the Federal Trade Commission says.

Insurers offering the products say business is soaring. For employers, the price can be relatively inexpensive, but it can save costs by avoiding the productivity losses that come when victims spend many hours clearing their names.

Salt River Project, an electricity provider to the Phoenix area, offered identity theft insurance to its 4,500 employees in July.

The program includes education on how to avoid theft (sent out via a weekly e-mail), a way to sign up for free credit reports and fraud monitoring and an outside vendor that provides assistance with resolution if an identity theft occurs. A few dozen employees already have sought the resolution services. The utility pays \$50 per employee per year for the program.

Durham, Ore.-based Frontier Management, which runs senior housing communities, provides an ID theft package for department heads and managers at all their properties.

They have about eight of these managers at any location and up to 20 properties. They've been offering it for about a year. The company pays all monthly premium costs.

"The general reaction is 'Wow, that's great,' because in Oregon, this is on the news on a daily basis," says Matthew Dunham, chief operating officer. "If someone had their ID stolen ... it can mentally drain you." American International Group (AIG) has focused in the past year on providing identity theft coverage as an employee benefit for companies. About 20 policies have been purchased by employers, and the insurer gets about six inquiries a week. Based on the type of plan that is selected, employees can get 24-hour phone assistance, a case manager to assist in recovery efforts and reimbursement of up to \$25,000 for lost wages or expenses such as notary fees.