South Carolina State Government Data Breach One Of The Largest In US History

October 29, 2012 - If you have filed a tax return in the State of South Carolina any time in the last 14 years, there is a good chance that European hackers now have your Social Security Number and other personally identifiable information on you. That's because the state's Department of Revenue - South Carolina's version of the IRS - was hacked back in August and nobody noticed. In fact, nobody noticed the hack until October 10th; giving the culprits behind the scam enough time to siphon off 3.6 million Social Security Numbers and 387,000 credit card numbers.

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While this isn't the largest data breach that has occurred in the United States, it is the largest data breach caused by hacking. The 3.6 million SSNs stolen in the breach represent roughly 80% of the state's population.

The scope of the breach is such that it doesn't just include taxpayers. For many years now, it has been a requirement for parents to include their children's SSNs on tax returns. This is likely to mean that children who live in the state, or whose parents file tax returns in South Carolina will also be impacted.

While the state is offering credit monitoring for one year to victims, ACCESS continues to take the position that credit monitoring is a worthless service that only notifies you after you have been victimized. Anyone who has reason to believe that their information may have been included in this breach should do several things to protect themselves.

First, if you have provided a credit card number to the State of South Carolina's Department of Revenue, call your bank and notify them. If the state no longer needs access to the card, you should ask your bank to reissue it.

Second, place a fraud alert on your credit file. You can do this by calling any of the three big credit reporting agencies (Equifax, TransUnion or Experian). If you don't need access to instant credit, then you may want to consider having a credit freeze place on your file. This is the best way to prevent identity theft. Another alternative would be to hire one of the many identity theft prevention companies that provide protective services which are much more comprehensive than credit monitoring. Some consumer advocates will tell you that these companies don't do anything that you can't do yourself however, hiring a professional organization will allow you to stop looking over your own shoulder and let someone else do the heavy lifting.

Third, start pulling your credit report at least three times per year. Federal law allows you to get a copy of your credit report for free, once each year, from each of the big three CRAs. Because of this, you can request a copy from one CRA now, and then in four months, from another CRA. Four months later, you can request on from the third CRA.

Although you can make these requests online, we don't advise this approach due to privacy concerns. The best way to request your credit report is to call Annual Credit Report at 1-877-322-8228. This is the only free credit report authorized by law and which doesn't have any strings attached to it.

ACCESS is urging anyone who has filed a South Carolina tax return to be proactive and to act quickly to protect yourself.

byJim Malmberg
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