Title:
New Tool Helps Protect Public From Identity Theft

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Summary:
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Article Body:
Remember the days when protecting your personal and financial information meant watching out for pickpockets and purse-snatchers? In today's technology-driven world, thieves have developed much more cunning and sophisticated ways to steal your identity.

Despite severe penalties - those convicted face up to 20 years in prison - identity theft is now the nation's fastest-growing crime, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation. More than 10 million people become victims of identity theft each year.

Thieves not only use their victims' identities to open bank and credit card accounts, they also rent or buy property, commit other crimes and misdemeanors and even obtain employment in their victims' names.

A credit report can let you know if someone has used your credit card without your knowledge or applied for a credit card in your name. It doesn't show everything, however. According to Harold Kraft, founder and chief executive officer of MyPublicInfo Inc., credit reports miss the most critical information. What you need, Kraft says, is a background check on yourself.

"Over a year ago, I had an unusual opportunity to run a background check on myself. I was curious to find out what potential employers, landlords, insurance companies and others could learn about average citizens like me," Kraft said. "I was staggered to receive 55 pages of data on the last 30 years of my life! This was not a credit check, but a background check, with information not available

in my credit report."

For about $80, MyPublicInfo provides consumers with a Public Information Profile, or PIP, a detailed summary of the information - gleaned from billions of public data records, including federal, state and county records; government license records; and law enforcement records - that others can obtain about them.

Although some of this information is available to the public, the average person would have to comb through data from thousands of sources to find all of it. The PIP consolidates the data into one easy-to-understand report. According to MyPublicInfo, this is the only tool of its kind currently available to consumers.

"Every time we buy a house, buy an insurance policy, make an insurance claim, open a utility account with a power company, get married, borrow money ... or are involved in any public transaction, it becomes part of our permanent personal background records," Kraft said. "This information can have serious consequences for a person's ability to get a job or insurance. And erroneous information may mean you have been a victim of mistaken identity or an identity crime."