

## The Clean-Credit Scam

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It sounds like a tempting offer—hide your credit problems by obtaining a *credit-privacy number* (CPN) to replace your Social Security number and use it when you are applying for credit. But CPNs, which are also called credit-protection numbers or credit-profile numbers, are always a scam.

Scammers pretend to be from credit-repair firms and solicit customers through ads on the Internet.

The scammers tell you that by using the nine-digit CPN instead of your Social Security number, you can build a brand-new “clean” credit history, thereby hiding any bad credit or a past bankruptcy.

The cost for this CPN? Hundreds—and sometimes even thousands—of dollars.

**Reality:** The Social Security Administration does not issue any such numbers, and credit bureaus don't accept anything other than legitimate Social Security numbers when they compile credit reports. The numbers sold as CPNs often are Social Security numbers stolen from children or from people

who have died. Or the scammers may have you apply for a federal Employer Identification Number (EIN) that the IRS issues for employment tax reporting, and they may tell you—incorrectly—that the EIN can be used as a CPN.

If a CPN turns out to be a stolen Social Security number, you could be charged with identity theft. Anyone using a CPN on a credit or loan application could be found guilty of bank, mail and/or wire fraud.

### *What to do:*

If you have a troubled credit history, use legitimate, government-approved credit-counseling services to help you negotiate payment plans with creditors. Also, dispute erroneous items on your credit report...and rebuild your credit score using legitimate means, such as by paying your bills on time and paying off your credit card debt.



*Bottom Line/Personal* interviewed John Ulzheimer, president of consumer education at CreditSesame.com, based in Mountain View, California, which offers free credit scores, credit reports and credit monitoring to consumers. He is founder of CreditExpertWitness.com.

