

FIGHTING BACK TO STOP FRAUD

Alerts, education are key to prevention

In 2016, Wayne Wiese submitted his income tax return in March. Imagine his surprise when the Internal Revenue Service told him it already had his return and had sent his refund—to someone else.

Wiese's Social Security number had been hijacked by an identity thief. "I had to prove who the real Wayne Wiese was."

At 63, Wiese, who lives in the village of Oregon, is a newly retired information technology manager who knows a few things about data security.

Wiese immediately stepped up the monitoring of his financial

accounts. He notified credit bureaus about the theft and corrected the record with the IRS. Still, a bank notified him about his new prepaid credit card, which he had not applied for.

Internet fraud and other thefts are a scourge for all consumers and hit older people especially hard. The federal Consumer Financial Protection Bureau reports that 17 percent of Americans 65 and older believe they've been the victim of "financial exploitation."

That's one reason why AARP Wisconsin is rolling out the Fraud Watch Network, a national program, on the state level.

Through community meetings and programs open to the public, AARP hopes to stymie fraud perpetrators by helping consumers learn about typical cons and how to combat them.

"This affects people from all walks of life," said Jeannie Tucker, the senior program specialist leading the new effort. "And once your identity has been stolen, there's no telling when or where a problem will occur."

Perpetrators count on victims' reluctance to get help. A key element of the Fraud Watch Network involves timely email alerts so people can avoid the latest scams.

Wisconsin ranks 30th in the country for identity theft, according to Federal Trade Commission data. In 2015, Wisconsinites 50 and older lost a reported \$5.2 million to online fraud, according to the FBI.

If they're caught, scammers face extra penalties under Wisconsin law for targeting seniors, said Michelle Reinen, longtime director of the state Bureau of

Consumer Protection. Fraud can hit consumers of any age and experience: "It's about the skills and ability of the scammer. They're very sophisticated."

REPORT SCAMS QUICKLY

Older people are targets because they have a lifetime of savings and tend to answer the phone and respond to unsolicited emails. Many are reluctant to ask for help because, Reinen said, "they may be afraid it will look like they can't manage their affairs."

But a swift response can help minimize the damage and protect your accounts, Reinen and Tucker agree. One strategy: Contact financial institutions where you have accounts and freeze all activity. Also, alert family and financial advisers to get their help.

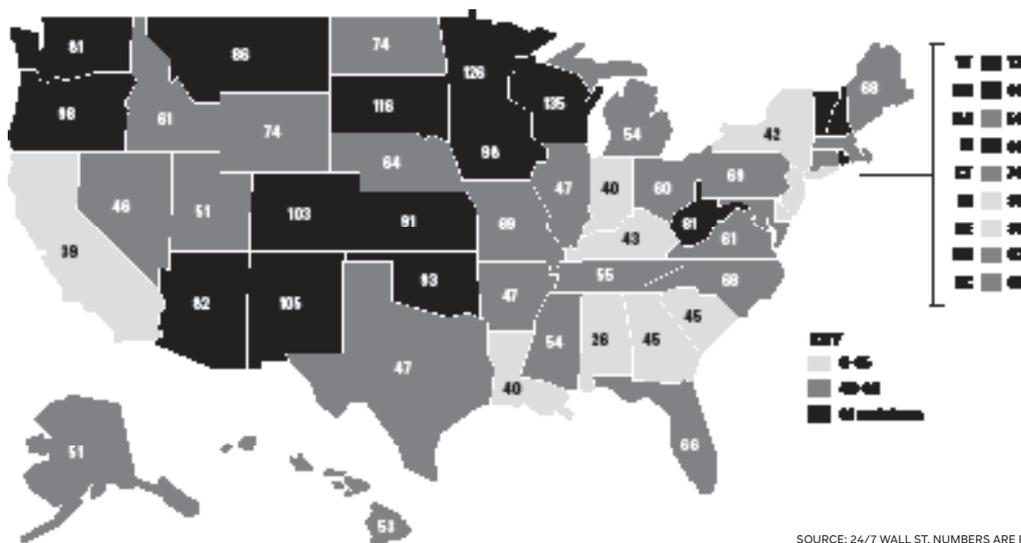
Here are other tips:

- Sign up for the Fraud Watch Network (aarp.org/fraudwatchnetwork) to get alerts about new scams. The network is planning community information programs to begin this month.
- Those interested in a presentation or becoming a presenter can contact Tucker at 608-286-6300 or jttucker@aarp.org.
- Report suspected or confirmed fraud to the state consumer protection hotline at 800-422-7128 or email DATCP@wi.gov. A Senior Guide with fraud prevention tips is available by calling the hotline. —*Joanne Cleaver*

DATABANK USA

Fatal Falls

DEATHS FROM FALLING PER 100,000 PEOPLE AGE 65-PLUS IN 2015



SOURCE: 24/7 WALL ST. NUMBERS ARE ROUNDED OFF.

74%

That's the percentage of AARP's roughly 846,000 members in Wisconsin who are concerned about protecting themselves against fraud. Nationally, it's 76 percent. Learn more at aarp.org/stopfinancialexploitation.

For other Wisconsin news, go to aarp.org/wi.