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OPEN HOUSES AND IDENTITY THEFT

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We all understand the importance of cleaning, decluttering and de-personalizing a home that's for sale. But one more vital step is often overlooked, and that's protecting your privacy.

Strangers will be coming through, and some of them aren't the least bit shy about opening drawers and cupboards, checking the inside of the fridge and peering into closets. That's okay—they need to know if your space suits their needs. But a few of those visitors could well take advantage of your openness to steal your private information. Maybe even your identity.

Most of us are generally trusting in nature, and that's a good character trait. It's important to see the goodness in all people. However, the reality is that we live in an age where identity theft is on the rise,

and personal protection is imperative.

Once the for sale sign goes up on the front lawn, a seller is at risk.

De-personalizing a home means more than simply taking down family photos from the mantel and removing the kids' artwork from the fridge door. Identity theft can happen when private information is left in sight during showings and open houses. How many times have you walked into a house and noticed utility bills on the kitchen counter or cheque books, voter registration cards, pay stubs, and so on? These items are an open invitation to thieves.

De-personalizing the home means moving all of these items from sight and keeping them in a safe, secure location. A locked desk drawer would be good place to house these items until after a firm Agreement of Purchase and Sale is in place.

Here's a list of ways to protect yourself.

9 Tips to Prevent Identity Theft at Your Open House

1. Remove all private or personal photos,

diplomas, awards and trophies.

2. Remove all calendars. These often contain a great deal of private information, often noting when you're not going to be home.

3. Store all valuables.

4. Remove all bills, letters, magazines and library books. Shred papers with personal information that are no longer needed.

5. Password protect your computer to block access to your private files.

6. Turn off your printer and fax machine before each showing. Printers and fax machines often have the capability of printing the last numbers dialed or received.

7. Turn off answering machines. This avoids personal messages being left while strangers are in your home.

8. Unplug phones with caller ID features.

9. Remove or conceal digital devices that contain information about you or your



family (cell phones, iPods, USB drives). Some of these suggestions might seem a bit extreme, but for most of us, our home is a sanctuary. We feel comfortable and safe and don't realize how exposed we may be when our house is on the market. It's just good strategy to not only de-personalize so that people can see themselves in your space, but also to safeguard against an unscrupulous visitor taking advantage of you.

“Don't make your open house an open invitation to thieves.”