



PENNSYLVANIA STATE POLICE

COMMUNITY AWARENESS BULLETIN

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SAFE ONLINE BANKING

The Pennsylvania State Police (PSP) and the Department of Banking and Securities (DoBS) would like to advise residents on safe online banking practices.

Online banking is a convenient way to check bank balances, verify transactions, transfer funds, and even deposit checks using a cell phone's camera. This allows consumers to manage their finances in real time, without having to wait for a paper statement to come in the mail.

However, the convenience of online banking comes with the risk that cybercriminals will steal personal or financial information. Identity theft is on the rise due to large data breaches and other cybercrime. Cybercriminals are also getting more creative in how they work. There are steps consumers can take to protect that information and reduce the risk of identity theft or having their money stolen.

Recommendations

The PSP and DoBS recommend the following tips for keeping account and personal information safe:

- Create strong passwords by using an assortment of letters (upper and lower case), numbers, and symbols. There should be no ties to your personal information and do not utilize dictionary words.
- Financial institutions you do business with will not ask you to provide personal information through text, email, or telephone call. Phone calls, texts, and emails can be easily spoofed to fool you into thinking that they are from your financial institution. If your financial institution calls, texts, or emails claiming there is a problem with your account that you must resolve immediately, do not give them any personal information. Log in through a bookmarked link on your computer or through the app to see if there really is a problem. Never use a link in an email or respond to a text to log into a financial or any other account – these links often contain malware to steal your information.
- Check your accounts on secure Wi-Fi or over cellular data, not over a public network such as at a coffee shop or a supermarket because those are easy for criminals to eavesdrop on. If you frequently use unsecure Wi-Fi, consider using a virtual private network (VPN). You can also look for mobile apps that check whether a Wi-Fi signal is secure in your app store.
- When shopping online, be aware of the different protections and liabilities for purchases made with credit and debit cards. If you are not sure of your options, contact your financial institution. Read more at <https://www.dobs.pa.gov/Documents/Publications/Handouts/Credit%20or%20Debit.pdf>.
- You should follow your credit closely and obtain a free credit report at least annually by visiting <https://www.annualcreditreport.com>. This is the only site where you can obtain a free, complete credit report as mandated by federal law. Being vigilant about your credit will help slow or stop the damage if your identity is stolen. You can also visit <https://www.pa.gov/guides/cybersecurity/> for more information.