**Are You Being Stalked? Tips For Protection**

These tips will help you guard your personal information and lessen the chance that it will get into the hands of a stalker or harasser. However, some of these tips are extreme and should only be used if you are indeed being stalked. Harassment can take many forms, so this information may not be appropriate in every situation and may not resolve serious stalking problems.

1. Use a private post office box. Residential addresses of post office box holders are generally confidential. However, the U.S. Postal Service will release a residential address to any government agency, or to persons serving court papers. The Post Office only requires verification from an attorney that a case is pending. This information is easily counterfeited.

Private companies, such as Mail Boxes Etc., will also give out residential addresses of their box holders, but these companies require the person making the request to have an original copy of a subpoena. Use your private post office box address for all of your correspondence. Print it on your checks instead of your residential address.

2. Don't fill out the change-of-address card at the Post Office. The U.S. Postal Service shares this information with the National Change of Address system. The NCOA updates mailing lists and files of marketing companies, credit bureaus and government agencies. The change of address card is also kept on file at the
post office of your last known address. Anyone can go to the Post Office and, for a three dollar fee, receive your new address.

Instead create your own postcard with your new address and mail it to family, friends and specific businesses. (In January 1994, the Postal Service announced it would discontinue this service by the spring. However, it will continue to release change-of-address information to the NCOA system unless you have filed a temporary restraining order.)

3. Make sure you have an unpublished _and_ unlisted phone number. The phone company lists names and numbers in directory assistance (411) and publishes them in the phone book. Make sure you delete your information from both places. Don't print your phone number on your checks. Always give out a work number when asked.

4. Have your name removed from any "reverse directories." The entries in these directories are in numerical order by phone number or by address. These books allow anyone who has just one piece of information, such as a phone number, to find where you live. Reverse directories are published by phone companies and direct marketers. (For more information, see Privacy Rights Clearinghouse fact sheet No. 4, "Junk Mail: How Did They Get All Get my Address?")

5. Avoid calling 800 and 900 number services. Your phone number could be "captured" by a serviced called Automatic Number Identification. It will also appear on the called party's bill at the end of the month. If you do call 800 numbers, consider using a pay phone.

6. Let people know that information about you should be held in confidence. Tell your employer, co-workers, friends, family and neighbors to be suspicious of people inquiring about your whereabouts or schedule.

7. Do not subscribe to magazines. One of the most widely used locator tools is a computer data base of magazine subscribers. Buy your favorites at the news stand.

8. Avoid using your middle initial. Middle initials are often used to differentiate people with common names. For example, someone searching the voter registration records or credit report files might find several people with the name, Jane Doe. If you have a common name and want to blend in with the crowd, don't add a middle initial.

9. When conducting business with a government agency, only fill in the _required_ pieces of information. Certain government agency records are public record. Anyone can access the information you disclose to the agency within that record. Public records such as voter registration, county assessor, county recorder and business licenses are especially valuable finding tools. Ask the agency if it allows address information to be confidential in certain situations. If possible, use a post office box and do not provide your middle initial, phone number
or your Social Security number. If you own property or a car, you may want to consider alternative forms of ownership, such as a trust. This would shield your personal address from the public record. (For information on which government records are public and which are confidential, see Privacy Rights Clearinghouse fact sheet No. 11, "From Cradle to Grave: Government Records and Your Privacy.")

10. Put your post office box on your driver's license. Don't show your license to just anyone. Of course you have to make some exceptions. A merchant may require the license as an ID when paying by check. But be cautious. Your license has a lot of valuable information to a stalker.

11. Don't put your name on the list of tenants on the front of your apartment building. If necessary, consider a variation of your name that only your friends and family would recognize.

12. Be very protective of your Social Security number. The SSN is the key to much of your personal information. Don't pre-print the number on anything such as your checks. Only give it out if required to do so and ask why the requester needs it. (For more information, see Privacy Rights Clearinghouse fact sheet No. 10, "My Social Security Number: How Secure Is It?")

13. Alert the three credit bureaus—TRW, Equifax and Trans Union—to your situation. Ask that they "flag" your record (put it "offline") so staff can be on the alert for fraudulent access. If they refuse, write to management and suggest a change in policy. (For the phone numbers of credit bureaus, see PRC's fact sheet No. 6, "How Private Is My Credit Report?")

14. If you are having a problem with harassing phone calls, put a beep tone on your line so callers think you are taping your calls. Use an answering machine to screen your calls, and put a "bluff message" on your machine to warn callers of possible taping or monitoring. Be aware that there are legal restrictions on taping of conversations. (For more information, see Privacy Rights Clearinghouse fact sheet No. 3, "How to Put An End to Unwanted or Harassing Phone Calls.")

15. If you have been physically threatened, or feel that you are in danger, you may need a temporary restraining order. A temporary restraining order, once filed with the court, legally compels the harasser to stay away from you, or he/she can be arrested. Keep in mind that papers filed for a TRO or police report may become public record. Put minimal amounts of information and only provide a post office box address. You should contact an attorney or legal aid office if a temporary restraining order becomes necessary.

16. And these final tips from someone who was stalked for over 3 years: For your own protection, get certified to carry pepper spray. Get a car phone or a beeper. Carry a polaroid camera. Never verify anything, like your home address, over the phone.

This tip sheet was developed in cooperation with
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This document is a work in progress. Your suggestions are most welcome.

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