

635 Florence Ave., Owatonna, MN 55060

EXTENSION NEWS RELEASE

Phyllis A. Onstad, Regional Extension Educator-Family Resource Management
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“FREE CREDIT REPORTS” ARE COMING IN 2005

Taking the time to do an annual financial check-up is smart money management. It needs to include reviewing credit reports and free help is coming.

March 2005 is the proposed start time for Minnesotan's to access their credit report free once per year from the 3 major credit bureaus. In late 2003 the Fair and Accurate Credit Transactions Act (FACTA) was passed and signed by President Bush. One of its provisions was free credit reports will be available annually to all consumers once the rules are in place. The Federal Trade Commission proposes starting the new system on the west coast in December 2004.

Knowing what is on your credit report is important and advocated by consumer educators and financial experts. Checking your credit report annually gives you an opportunity to make sure it is accurate and if not, means for getting it corrected. How you handle your finances is looked at by many services, such as loan or rental applications, and even potential employers. Knowing what's on your report can help protect oneself from identity theft, too.

Fees are charged for obtaining your credit report unless you've been a victim of fraud, denied credit, insurance or employment, or are unemployed and seeking work, or receiving public assistance. In Minnesota, consumers requesting their reports are only charged \$3 per report. Be careful and cautious about so called “free credit reports” available on line. Those usually are a sales technique for offering on-going credit report checking with a monthly fee.

It's recommended that reports be obtained from all three major credit bureaus when doing a credit report check-up. There may be variations among the companies on the data obtained. Some creditors may only record information with one of the bureaus. Obtaining your credit report for review does not lower the FICO credit score either.

To obtain your credit reports now, use the following information to order:

Experian: P.O. Box 9595, Allen, TX 75013-9595 or call toll-free: 888-397-3742; Equifax: P.O. Box 105851, Atlanta, GA 30348-5851 or call toll-free: 800-685-1111 and Trans Union, P.O. Box 1000, Chester, PA 19022-1000 or call toll-free: 800-916-8800.

Know what's on your credit report. Make this a part of an annual financial check-up.

Phyllis Onstad is a Regional Extension Educator with the University of Minnesota Extension Service serving Steele County. She can be reached at (507)280-2863.

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