

# Consumer News & Views

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## *In this Issue...*

- **Consumer Confidence Jumps Amid Strong Economic News.**
- **Why Does the NCUA Continue to Limit Consumers from Joining Credit Unions?**
- **Two Ways to Protect Yourself from Identity Theft.**
- **ACC Adds Regional Office in Portland, Maine.**
- **ACC's Partners with Advice IQ for Financial Education.**
- **Why are Federal Regulators Punishing Consumers Who Want to Join a Credit Union?**
- **Fleet Financial Can Help Consumers Save on Auto Loans**
- **Apply for the 2013 Green C<sup>SM</sup> Certification Program.**

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**Consumer Confidence Jumps Amid Strong Economic News.** Consumer confidence took a big leap this month based on an improving job market. The Conference Board said its Consumer Confidence Index reached 90.9 in July, up from 86.4 in June. It was the third straight monthly increase and the best reading since October 2007.

According to *USA Today*, the report follows a five-month string of bright employment reports after a rocky start to the year that's been mostly blamed on an economically-crippling hard winter. From February through June, the economy has added more than 1.2 million jobs and the unemployment rate has fallen to 6.1% from 6.7%.

Thomas Hinton, president of the American Consumer Council said, "The continued rise in consumer confidence reflects a steady pattern of job growth and economic recovery for most consumers." However, Hinton cautioned that "It's up to the federal government not to pop this economic bubble by over-taxing consumers and adding more regulations that further inhibit companies from growing and consumers from spending."



The American Consumer Council anticipates an annual GDP growth rate of over 2% in 2014 despite a brutal winter that stalled first quarter growth and resulted in a -2.9% growth rate. Hinton stated, "If we can continue to build momentum, the American economy will more than make-up that deficit. We're forecasting a very strong second half."

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## Two Ways to Protect Yourself from Identity Theft. By Geoff Williams

To prevent fraud, keep an eye out for these red flags...



Leaving your purse or wallet in a vulnerable place like a shopping cart can increase your chances of being a victim of identity theft. There's really only one way to protect yourself from identity theft. Stop spending money and trust no one. It's pretty easy.

OK, it isn't easy. Talk to enough victims of identity theft, and you start to realize that it really can happen to anyone – and sometimes, no matter how careful you are, it can happen to you. That's why it helps to study how people's identities were stolen and learn from it. Here a few ways identity theft happens along with strategies to prevent it.

**Information is out there for anyone to see.** Of course you don't want to leave credit card statements lying around in public places, and when you discard your financial paperwork, it's smart to run it through a shredder. But sometimes when you're out in the world, your information can't help become a little exposed. You type a PIN number onto a pad and realize someone might have been looking over your shoulder. You hand your credit card to a waiter, who disappears for a while with it. Or you're in a crowded store, practically rubbing elbows with an identity thief.

Sarah Dugo, co-founder of College Savings Dolls, a Schaumburg, Illinois-based company that sells dolls designed to inspire kids to go to college, got an unwanted education on identity theft a few years ago. She was at a crowded Best Buy and bought a big-screen TV for the Super Bowl.

"The cashier took my credit card and delivery information, but they left it all on the computer screen and walked away from the check-out area. I was at one of the checkouts in the smaller section [of the store], not the main front exit," Dugo says.

It turns out that the thief used Dugo's credit card information to order the same big-screen TV – and had it sent to his address. "That's how they caught him," Dugo says. Still, the crook did enough damage to her credit report and credit score that it took two years for her to straighten it all out.

She was in one of those situations where the employee ringing her up was interrupted by a customer before finishing her transaction. Dugo isn't positive, but she thinks that's how someone was able to see her information and either jot everything down or snap a photo of the computer screen.

Dugo isn't sure what she could have done differently, but she figures that if she is ever shopping on another crowded weekend, she may make her purchase at the main entrance, where department sales clerks aren't likely to be pulled away from the register.

**You put your wallet or handbag in a vulnerable position.** "Several years ago, I was shopping at a Safeway near my house. I was in the shampoo aisle and a well-dressed man asked me to help him find a product his wife asked him to get," says Caren Kagan Evans, CEO of ECI Communications, a public relations firm in Rockville, Maryland.

While Evans pointed to the top shelf to show him where the product was, another man took Evans's wallet out of her handbag, which was in the top part of her cart.

"I didn't realize my wallet had been stolen until I went to check out," Evans says. "I ran home, contacted the credit agencies, contacted my bank and, of course, contacted my credit card companies." Unfortunately, her Social Security number was printed on her health insurance card, so the two men now had that information as well.

"This was a large group of people that were doing this kind of thing up and down the East Coast," she says. "In a matter of just an hour, the team had used my cards at gas stations, Target and I can't remember where else. They also were able to get checks printed since they had my Social, and thousands of dollars disappeared from my checking account."

Evans says she was lucky because she got her money back and was able to fix everything relatively quickly. "I have heard stories of people who had their identities stolen where the perpetrator took out mortgages on properties, and stories of people who literally spent years getting everything straightened out," she says.

## Why Does the NCUA Continue to Limit Consumers from Joining Credit Unions?

For the past ten months, the National Credit Union (NCUA) has been conducting a "quality control review" of the American Consumer Council (ACC). In the process, thousands of consumers across the country have been blocked from joining federal credit unions.

According to leaders of the American Consumer Council this action by the NCUA's Office of Consumer Protection (OCP) is "counter-productive and frustrates consumers who want to join credit unions."



Barbara Yager, an attorney and member of the ACC's board of directors questioned the rationale of the NCUA's ten-month review of ACC. "As an association, we're concerned that the NCUA's quality control review process is both unstructured and undefined. It seems we're chasing a moving target. Over the past 20 years, the NCUA has approved ACC as an associational SEG 45 times! Now, in the face of criticism from the banking lobby, the NCUA-OCP seems to be searching for an association scapegoat to curb the membership growth of credit unions through associations. ACC is a legitimate national association that has partnered with credit unions since 1994 to give consumers greater access to credit unions and provide financial education programs with credit unions. Why is the NCUA punishing consumers and their national associations for doing the right thing?"

Thomas Hinton, president of ACC, told members at the association's annual meeting in June, "For the past ten months, ACC has voluntarily responded to every question asked of us by the NCUA in an effort to demonstrate our full compliance with their associational SEG requirements.

"We have provided more data than the NCUA has asked for. We have clearly proven ACC's compliance with the NCUA's *Totality of the Circumstances* test – their measure for compliance as an associational SEG. We have also demonstrated how our members participate in various association programs and how we operate within reasonable proximity of our members. It should not be the purview of the NCUA to dictate to ACC how we manage or operate our association. That is the Board of Director's purview. In the final analysis, the NCUA's review process is grossly unfair to consumers and hurts consumers at a time when they desperately need greater access to credit unions, not less access."

**ACC Adds Regional Office in Portland, Maine.** In response to a growing number of new members in the northeast, the American Consumer Council has relocated the New England Consumer Council headquarters and ACC regional office to Portland, Maine. The address is: 477 Congress Street, 5th Floor, Portland, Maine 04101-3431. Telephone: 1-800-544-0414.




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## ACC's Partners with AdviceIQ to Offer More Financial Education Programs to Consumers.



As part of ACC's growing commitment to financial education, your association has partnered with New York City-based Advice IQ to offer more than 30 programs over the next year.

AdviceIQ will not only offer consumers access to dozens of articles, podcasts and webinars through the American Consumer Council, but also a national database to find trusted financial advisors who possess specific expertise in several key areas.

This information will be available to ACC members at no cost by visiting our website at: [www.americanconsumercouncil.org](http://www.americanconsumercouncil.org) and clicking on the AdviceIQ button.

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## Green C<sup>SM</sup> Certification Accepting Applications for 2014 Summer Cycle:

If your company or organization would like to increase its credibility with consumers, you should consider applying for the **Green C<sup>SM</sup> Certification**. Applications for the 2014 Summer cycle are now being accepted through August 31, 2014.

It's a proven fact that consumers want to do business with companies that are eco-friendly and practice Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The process is straight-forward and all applicants are recognized by ACC and the Green USA Institute.

All applicants complete the criteria and submit their responses to ACC's Green Consumer Council for review, assessment and feedback. Program details and the **Green C<sup>SM</sup> Certification** criteria can be viewed at ACC's website located at: <http://americanconsumercouncil.org/greenc.asp>

