

Equifax says data from 143 million Americans exposed in hack

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This July 21, 2012, photo shows Equifax Inc., offices in Atlanta. Credit monitoring company Equifax says a breach exposed social security numbers and other data from about 143 million Americans. The Atlanta-based company said Thursday, Sept. 7, 2017, that "criminals" exploited a U.S. website application to access files between mid-May and July of this year. (AP Photo/Mike Stewart)

The Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Credit monitoring company Equifax has been hit by a high-tech heist that exposed the social security numbers and other data of about 143 million Americans. Now those people have to worry about the threat of having their identities stolen.

The Atlanta-based company said Thursday that "criminals" exploited a U.S. website application to access files between mid-May and July of this year.

The theft obtained consumers' names, Social Security numbers, birth dates, addresses and, in some cases, driver's license numbers. Such sensitive information can be enough for crooks to hijack the identities of people whose credentials were stolen through no fault of their own, potentially wreaking havoc on the victims' lives.

Equifax discovered the hack July 29, but waited until Thursday to warn consumers. The Atlanta-based company has set up a special website, <https://www.equifaxsecurity2017.com/>, where people can check to see if their

personal information may have been stolen. Consumers can also call 866-447-7559 for more information.

This isn't the biggest data breach in history. That indignity still belongs to Yahoo, which was targeted in at least two separate digital burglaries that affected more than 1 billion of its users' accounts throughout the world.

But no Social Security numbers or drivers' license were taken in the Yahoo break-in.

Equifax's security lapse could be the largest involving the theft of Social Security numbers, one of the most common methods used to confirm a person's identity in the U.S. It eclipses a 2015 hack at health insurer Anthem Inc. that involved the Social Security numbers of about 80 million people .

Besides all the personal information that was stolen in its breach, Equifax said the credit card numbers for about 209,000 U.S. consumers were also taken.

The company said hackers also accessed some "limited personal information" from British and Canadian residents.

Equifax said it doesn't believe that any consumers from other countries were affected.