



**Coastal CARDIOLOGY**

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## Common names raise ID theft risk

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**FORT MYERS:** What's in a name? Experts say a lot - especially when it comes to your identity. So could your name - particularly if it's a common one - be making you a target for identity thieves?

If you look through the phone book, it's easy to see some names are a lot more common than others.

In Lee County alone, there are more than 2,000 "Smith's" and only one person with the last name "Spaw."

Experts say having a name like "Smith" could put your identity at risk. Find out just how common your name is by [searching our database](#).

On the surface, it might seem like Mildred Smith and Mark Johnson have nothing in common. He's 50, she's almost 80. She likes flowers, he likes bikes.

Johnson and Smith don't know each other, but they actually have a lot in common.

They both live in Cape Coral, they both have two of the most common last names in the country and they're both victims of identity theft.

"I am absolutely appalled. I'm more frustrated I can't do anything about it," Smith said.

Smith and Johnson don't know how their identities were stolen, but experts say their names could be a factor.

Smith is the number-one most common name in the country. Johnson is the second.

"I knew it's a very common name. I didn't realize it was *that* common. I could see where it could be a problem," Johnson said.

Fourteen million Americans have one of ten last names, according to researchers with the National White Collar Crime Center.

They say there are several reasons why your name puts you at risk.

- **People with common names often have common email addresses.**

Because identity thieves use programs that generate email addresses with common words and names - having a common name means more spam and more chances for identity theft.

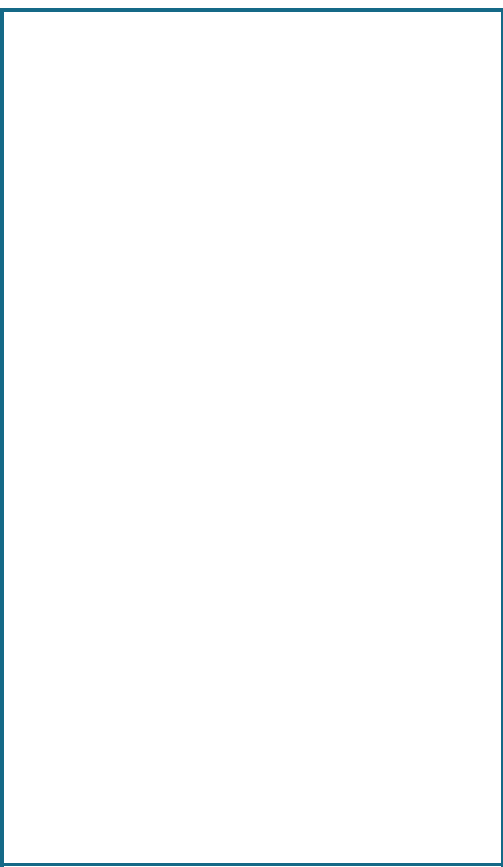
"So, if you have a common name and your email address reflects that, you have a better chance of being caught up in those mass email targeted campaigns," said John Kane of the National White Collar Crime Center.

- **If you have a common name, you're more likely to share it with an identity thief.**

"It creates a layer of confusion for law enforcement. When you're trying to help a victim - Mary Smith - the actual identity thief shares the same name," Kane said.

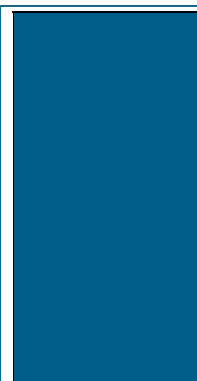
- **With so many public records available online, a thief trolling for info is more likely to type in a common name than a complicated one.**

- **Many people are victimized by family members with the same name.**




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"There's usually some family involvement. John Smith Sr., John Smith Jr. I've had a case like that," said Steve Butcher with United States Secret Service.

Bottom line - a name like "Miller" can put you more at risk than someone with a name like "Mikolowski."

No matter what name you're born with, it's important to take precautions against identity theft.

Shred your documents, delete emails from people you don't know and check your credit report regularly.

"Nobody else is going to take care of you, except yourself," Butcher said.

Find out just how common your name is by [searching our database](#).

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