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## Identity Theft Protection Specialist Loses Unencrypted Tape

*Up to 650,000 customers compromised as unencrypted tape disappears from Iron Mountain*

By Mary Jander

An unencrypted backup tape missing from an Iron Mountain storage facility has forced a major credit card company that specializes in online credit protection to contact hundreds of thousands of customers.

GE Money, a Stamford, Conn.-based subsidiary of General Electric that manages credit card transactions for retailers, acknowledges that backup data on 650,000 people, including employees of GE Money as well as customers of about 230 U.S. retailers that use GE Money's services, is now lost.

Iron Mountain claims to have discovered the error when the service provider went to find the tape in an Iron Mountain vault at the request of GE Money in October. When the tape couldn't be found, Iron Mountain says it immediately notified GE Money and launched a search.

GE Money says it has no evidence the tape was stolen or that the data on it has been accessed. The company says it's offered "some individuals whose information is included on the unencrypted tape" a year of free credit-monitoring service.

Additional steps are also being taken by GE Money to "prevent situations like this from occurring in the future." But what those steps are isn't being specified.

GE Money spokesman Richard Jones says his company has no comment on the fact that the tape was unencrypted.

GE Money specializes in secure online transactions, identity theft protection, and protection against online scams. As part of its personal credit card services, for instance, customers have the option of credit activity monitoring, with email or pager notification in case of suspicious activity. GE Money also offers a fraud resource center and identity theft reimbursement coverage of up to \$5,000 for individual cardholders.

Iron Mountain spokesman Dan O'Neill says his company's convinced the information on the tape hasn't compromised anyone's credit. He refers to Iron Mountain's public statement on the matter: "We believe this is an unfortunate case of a misplaced tape... Since we notified GE Money of the missing back-up tape in October, there has been no evidence to suggest that any person's identity has been compromised as a result. And we don't know of any incident, ever, when a lost back-up tape has resulted in identity theft. We regret this mishap and the concern and inconvenience it has caused GE Money and its customers."

Both Iron Mountain and GE Money claim that the backup tape would be nearly impossible for someone without special training and equipment to crack, despite its being unencrypted.