



## Justice Dept. criticized over identify theft

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WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The Justice Department has failed to treat identity theft, one of the nation's fastest growing crimes, as a priority, the agency's inspector general said in a report released on Tuesday.

The department has not made a coordinated approach to fight identity theft, and efforts to reduce it have faded as a priority, according to the report from Inspector General Glenn Fine.

Identity theft affects an estimated 10 million Americans annually, the report said. Victims suffer financial losses and tremendous inconvenience in trying to repair damage to their names or credit histories.

The report comes after last week's sentencing in Boston of one of the world's most notorious computer hackers, who got 20 years in prison for helping run a global ring that stole tens of millions of payment card numbers.

Albert Gonzalez, a 28-year-old college dropout from Miami, had pleaded guilty to helping lead a ring that stole more than 40 million payment card numbers by breaking into retailers, including TJX Cos Inc, BJ's Wholesale Club Inc and Barnes & Noble.

The inspector general's audit determined that the Justice Department does not have an internal strategy to fight identity theft and that it has not appointed any individual or office to coordinate its efforts.

The report says that the department needs more leadership to fix its deficiencies on identity theft.

(Reporting by James Vicini, Editing by Robert MacMillan)

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