

## One in Three American Households Victimized by White Collar Crime

*New National Survey Shows Changing Attitude Among Citizens And Growing Concern With Justice System's Ability To Prosecute*

CHARLESTON, WV - One in three American households are now the victim of white collar crime according to new research conducted by the National White Collar Crime Center (NW3C). The findings also reveal a growing public concern with the seriousness of white collar crime and the criminal justice system's ability to control it.

The survey, which was conducted between January and April 1999 by the Training and Research Institute of the National White Collar Crime Center in Morgantown, W.V., is the first of its kind in nearly two decades.

"Experiences and attitudes regarding fraud and other white collar crimes have changed, and the results demand our attention," said West Virginia State Auditor Glen B. Gainer III, chairman of the board of directors for the National White Collar Crime Center (NW3C) in releasing the National Public Survey on White Collar Crime. "The citizens of the United States are being victimized by fraud and are concerned about what their government is doing to protect them. From a law enforcement perspective, those of us who investigate and prosecute these crimes can expect more public demand to address these problems, particularly in light of recent drops in traditional street crimes."

Findings from the report show that during a 12-month period, one in every three households (36 percent) was victimized by a form of white collar crime. With regard to perceptions of the seriousness of white collar crime, the survey dispels early work that indicated the public was not concerned about fraud and white collar crime affecting them. Instead, the research shows that the public now views certain white collar crime offenses as equal to or more serious than certain traditional street crimes.

A curious finding of the research is that a wide disparity exists between how Americans believe they will react when they are victimized by a white collar crime and how they actually do react. While the number of victimizations was higher than predicted, the reporting of these crimes remained low. Only seven percent of respondents contacted an enforcement agency. Consumer protection agencies, Better Business Bureaus, and prosecutors combined received an additional 14 percent.

"This indicates an uncertainty on the part of the public as to how and where to report an incident of white collar crime," said Gainer, who continued, "The research shows a disappointing pattern of reporting to enforcement agencies. As public servants, we should be working harder and communicating better with our citizens to ensure that they can easily report victimization to

enforcement agencies. It is also important to recognize the need to provide local enforcement agencies with support to better manage these reports so that appropriate action can be taken against perpetrators.

"The information in this report will be of great value to all organizations fighting fraud. It will be potent ammunition to help sustain organizational and financial support for existing white collar crime control programs, and will help secure the critically needed additional resources as enforcement agencies begin to focus more on this threat to our citizens" Gainer added.

A copy of the 45-page monograph entitled, *The National Public Survey on White Collar Crime*, is available through the NW3C's Training and Research Institute. To obtain a copy of the monograph, please [contact us](#).