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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Identity Theft A Growing Concern for Wisconsin Consumers

Increase in Identity Theft Complaints From Wisconsin Consumers Spurs Identity Theft Insurance

MADISON, Wisconsin (March 19, 2004) – Incidents of identity theft are on the rise in Wisconsin, reflecting a nationwide increase.

According to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the number of Wisconsin identity theft victims rose more than 23% in 2003 (up to 2,325 from 1,777 in 2002). Nationally, the number of identity theft complaints rose 32% in 2003.

Wisconsin was ranked #35 by the (FTC) with 42.5 identity theft victims per 100,000 people (Arizona had the most instances at 122.4 and South Dakota the least at 19.6). Of the 214,905 identity theft victims nationwide in 2003, credit card fraud, phone or utilities fraud and bank fraud were the top three ways victims' information was misused.

The most common ways identity thieves get a hold of personal information includes foraging through trash, breaking into computers, stealing mail or wallets, illegally obtaining files at hospitals, banks, schools or businesses or most disconcertingly, they can even be a friend, coworker or relative who has access to personal information.

“Identity theft is an increasingly important issue for consumers and businesses,” comments Ron Von Haden, Executive Vice President of the Professional Insurance Agents of Wisconsin.

“The insurance industry is working hard to find insurance solutions that help protect people from identity theft fraud.”

How Consumers Can Protect Themselves

Identity theft insurance is just one of the ways consumers can protect themselves from having their identity stolen. Below are some tips from the Identity Theft Resource Center to help decrease the risk of becoming a victim:

- Check your credit reports once a year from all three of the credit reporting agencies. (Equifax - www.credit.equifax.com or 800-685-1111, Experian - www.experian.com or 888-397-3742 and TransUnion - www.transunion.com or 800-888-4213.)
- Guard your Social Security number. When possible, don't carry your Social Security card with you.
- Don't put your Social Security or drivers license number on your checks.
- Guard your personal information. You should never give your Social Security number to anyone unless they have a good reason for needing it.
- Watch for people who may try to eavesdrop and overhear the information you give out orally. Carefully destroy papers you throw out, especially those with sensitive or identifying information. A crosscut paper shredder works best.
- Be suspicious of telephone solicitors. Never provide information unless you have initiated the call.
- For more information about preventing identity theft, go to the Identity Theft Resource Center (idtheftcenter.org) and the Federal Trade Commission (consumer.gov/idtheft or 877-IDTHEFT).

What to Do When Identity is Stolen

The FTC recommends the following steps for consumers who know or suspect their identity has been stolen:

- Contact the fraud departments of any one of the three major credit bureaus to place a fraud alert on credit files (As soon as the credit bureau confirms the fraud alert, the other two credit bureaus will be automatically notified.)
- Close any accounts that have been tampered with or opened fraudulently.
- File a police report. Obtain a copy of the report to submit to creditors and others that may require proof of the crime.
- File a complaint with the FTC.

The PIA of Wisconsin represents nearly 600 independent insurance agencies across the state. Independent insurance agents offer “Choices” in insurance coverage, delivering better coverage at a better price than agents representing single insurance companies. For more information about identity theft or to locate a PIA member near you, look for the PIA logo or go to www.PIAW.org.

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