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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Wisconsin Businesses Can Help Protect Against Identity Theft**

*Identity Theft Facts for Businesses*

MADISON, Wisconsin (March 19, 2004) – According to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), incidents of identity theft in Wisconsin rose more than 23% in 2003, reflecting a nationwide increase. Businesses are being impacted by this trend just as much as consumers.

In today's world of technology, it is virtually impossible for businesses not to deal with some type of personally identifying information be it names and addresses, social security numbers, credit card numbers or other information about employees, patients, students, customers or others.

“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.”

**Tips for Safe Information Handling**

Below are tips from the Identity Theft Resource Center ([idtheftcenter.org](http://idtheftcenter.org)) for businesses to evaluate their information handling security and reduce the risk of identity theft:

- Information acquisition - Do you need the information? Are you acquiring it in a safe manner?

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- Storage - What computer security measures have you placed around the systems storing personal data? It should be highly classified and not commonly accessed.
- Access - Who has access? Is it on a need to know basis and access audited? Is there password control over systems? Is there a cafeteria worker asking your child for his/her social security number prior to receiving lunch? Did you do a background check on those who have access to personal information of employees and customers? Do temps have access to secure info?
- Disposal - Are electronic and paper documents containing personal information rendered unreadable prior to disposal? What is in your dumpster? Is it a treasure chest for thieves and for consumer action attorneys ready to sue you for placing their clients in jeopardy?
- Distribution - How do you handle information? Is your employee requiring a member of the public to repeat a SSN out loud where it can be overheard? The public display, use and exchange of SSN (including on membership cards carried in wallets) needs to be reconsidered.

**Other tips:**

- Fraud and security alerts placed on credit reports must be honored. If a consumer requests that they be called prior to opening a credit card, do so.
- Businesses that print cash register receipts need to make sure credit card numbers are partially truncated to help consumers avoid credit card takeover.
- Mail sent to the public either should not include account information or social security numbers. At the very least, truncating part of the number should be considered.

## **When Personal Information is Compromised**

If personal information has been compromised at your business, the Federal Trade Commission ([ftc.gov](http://ftc.gov) or [consumer.gov/idtheft](http://consumer.gov/idtheft)) recommends taking the following steps:

- Notify Law Enforcement – Call your local police to report your situation when the information compromise could result in harm to a person or business.
- Notify Affected Businesses – Businesses other than yours can be impacted by information compromises, such as banks, credit institutions and other organizations.
- Notify Individuals – Early notification allows individuals to take immediate steps to reduce the impact the misuse of their information will have.

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](http://www.PIAW.org).

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