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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Protect Yourself From Identity Theft

The Professional Insurance Agents of Wisconsin offer the following tips for protecting your personal information

MADISON, Wisconsin (December 12, 2006) – It is estimated that one in five people will be affected by identity theft in their lifetime. When someone steals your identity, it can have long lasting repercussions on your credit score and it can take years to clean up your credit report. You may also find it difficult to purchase a home or car, take out a student loan or open a line of credit. It can also impact your insurance rate.

“Many consumers don’t realize that their insurance score is partially based on their credit score and history,” says Ron Von Haden, CIC, Executive Vice President of the Professional Insurance Agents of Wisconsin (PIAW). “Studies have shown that the way someone handles their finances is a good predictor of insurance claims. If you have a low credit score, it will affect the rate you receive from your insurance company. High premiums or even denial of coverage can be unfortunate results of identity theft.”

Von Haden continues, “The PIAW has an informational brochure explaining the basics of credit scoring. The brochure covers topics such as: what is insurance scoring, how insurance scores are assigned, what determines credit scores, negative impacts on credit scores, maintaining and fixing credit scores as well as steps to take when a credit report has errors that can result from identity theft.”

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The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) estimates that 9.3 million Americans have been victims of identity theft in the last 12 months. It is important that you take some simple steps to protect yourself and your personal information:

- Exercise caution when you give out information such as your Social Security number and credit card numbers. Make sure you know and trust the company/organization before you give them your information.
- Shred any documents that contain personal information, including credit card offers you may receive in the mail. One of the easiest ways for someone to steal your identity is to pull a bill or credit card offer out of the trash and fill out the application.
- Put passwords on credit card and bank accounts.
- If any of your personal information is stored on your computer, make sure you install firewall and other security software that will help prevent hackers from gaining access to your computer. This is especially important if you have a high-speed internet connection.
- Review your credit report at least once a year to look for discrepancies. If you have been a victim of identity theft, you should review them more frequently to make sure all of the fraudulent purchases are cleared up.

To obtain a copy of the PIAW's credit scoring brochure or locate a PIA member near you, look for the PIA logo or go to www.PIAW.org.

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