

Agencies Combine Forces to Hold Shred Day in Cambridge, Urge Increased Awareness of Personal Data and Identity Theft Protection

Consumers reminded to properly dispose of documents to reduce risk of ID theft

CAMBRIDGE - July 31, 2010 - A consortium comprised of the Patrick-Murray Office of Consumer Affairs and Business Regulation, the Cambridge Consumers' Council, the City of Cambridge, the Federal Trade Commission, the United States Postal Inspection Service, and the United States Postal Service celebrated a Shred Day today, providing the public an opportunity to destroy documents while reminding consumers of the need to protect their personal information.

The event, held at the Central Square Post Office, offered Cambridge-area residents the opportunity to properly dispose of documents like bank statements, tax records, and other paperwork that may include personal data like Social Security numbers or account information. Shredding documents, whether at home with a personal shredder or at community events, is a good step in preventing identity theft, officials said.

"Protecting personal information is more important than ever, and really requires more effort than ever as identity thieves are smarter and more aggressive," said Barbara Anthony, Undersecretary of the Office of Consumer Affairs and Business Regulation. "There is a wealth of information on much of the paperwork we all keep at home, and destroying it at the appropriate times and on a regular basis is very important."

Shred Day included donated equipment and staff from DataShredder of Cambridge, a local company, refreshments donated by the three Cambridge Whole Foods Market locations, and was organized by the Cambridge Consumers' Council. The Consumers' Council works closely with city officials on consumer issues in the city.

"The Cambridge Consumers' Council places a great emphasis on educating and protecting its citizenry. While identity theft is nothing new, thieves are becoming much more sophisticated and the number of new victims is growing," said Laura M. Nichols, Executive Director of the Cambridge Consumers' Council. "It is important to take as many steps as possible to prevent thieves from putting the 'puzzle of personal information' together, and regularly shredding documents that contain such information is one way to do this."

"Cambridge is honored to host this important event to educate and inform the public about the importance of protecting themselves from identity theft," said Cambridge Mayor David P. Maher. "Shredding Day is an important opportunity to share simple yet effective tips that will enable people to protect their identities and avoid the costly and lengthy process to restore one's identity if it is stolen."

Identity theft is consistently an issue that affects millions of consumers every year. Earlier this year, the Federal Trade Commission identified it as the most-frequent problem reported nationally as well as by Massachusetts consumers, and the United States Postal Inspection Service is vigilantly working on mail-related identity theft. In the first two years

of breach notification requirements in Massachusetts, the Office of Consumer Affairs received reports involving over 1 million Massachusetts residents whose personal information was lost or stolen.

"There are many measures consumers can take to reduce the risk that they will be victims of identity theft. Shredding documents that have personal identifying information is one of them," said Leonard Gordon, Director of the Federal Trade Commission's Northeast Region. "Consumers can get other valuable information about avoiding identity theft from our Web site at www.ftc.gov."

"Document shredding is a critical first step for consumers to take in actively protecting their information from criminal misuse," said Joseph Gugliotta, Postal Inspector for the United States Postal Inspection Service.

During the event, officials discussed consumer tips for protecting personal information, including:

- If you are not already shredding documents, you should.
- If you are investing in a shredder, make sure it is a machine that "cross cuts" documents in two directions.
- If you store personal documents at home, it is best to keep them in a locked drawer or file cabinet.
- Destroy all documents with sensitive information, including account numbers, birth dates, password or PIN information, signatures or Social Security numbers.
- Tax documents should be held for seven years.
- Pay stubs and bank statements should be kept for one year, credit-card statements for at least 45 days.
- Medical records should be kept for at least a year, insurance records for the life of the policy plus five years.
- Utility and phone bills should be shredded right after they are paid.

"For businesses, whether you know it or not, you have an 'implied contract' to protect your customers' information simply based on the fact that you are collecting their data, and the new

Written Information Security Plan law legally requires all businesses no matter how small to have specific steps to destroy said info," said Scott Hovan, Vice President of DataShredder of Cambridge. " For consumers, privacy is the new 'hot' consumer awareness issue and confidential information in your trash is too easy a target for any person to come along and take your personal info and do whatever they want with it."