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March 11, 2016

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## **Attorney General: Arm Yourself against Identity Thieves**

*Albuquerque, NM* – This Consumer Protection Week, Attorney General Hector Balderas has a message for New Mexicans: arm yourself against identity thieves. Identity theft is a crime in which an impostor obtains key pieces of personal identifying information (PII) such as Social Security numbers and driver's license numbers and uses them for their own personal gain. It can start with lost or stolen wallets, stolen mail, a data breach, computer virus, "phishing" scams, or paper documents thrown out by you or a business.

"Become an informed consumer this Consumer Protection Week so you can arm yourself against identity thieves," said Attorney General Balderas.

### **Tips to minimize your risk of becoming an identity theft victim:**

- Don't give out personal information over the phone, through the mail or over the Internet unless you initiated the contact. Don't give out your Social Security number unnecessarily (only for tax reasons, credit or verified employment). Before providing personal identifiers, know how they will be used and if your information will be shared.
- Use a cross-cut shredder to dispose of documents with personal information.
- Place outgoing mail in collection boxes or at the U.S. Post Office.
- Know your billing cycles and contact creditors when bills fail to show up in the mail. Review bank and credit card statements carefully.
- Password protect your financial accounts. A strong password should be more than eight characters in length, contain both capital and lowercase letters, and contain at least one numeric or other non-alphabetical character. Use of non-dictionary words is also recommended.
- Use firewall software to protect computer information. Keep virus and spyware software programs updated.
- Reduce the number of preapproved credit card offers you receive by calling 1-888-5OPT-OUT.
- Order your free annual credit reports on-line at: [www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com) or by calling (877) 322-8228.
- You may also "freeze" your credit report. For more information visit <http://consumersunion.org/pdf/security/securityNM.pdf>.

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