



## **Your Computer– *Protecting Your Sensitive Files***

You may use your computer to keep your financial records, purchase goods over the internet or to check on your bank and investment accounts. As a result, your Social Security, bank account and other sensitive information will be stored on your computer. Follow these suggestions to protect your computer files:

- Update your virus protection software regularly, ideally, automatically each week.
- Do not open files sent to you by strangers, or click on hyperlinks or download programs from people you don't know. Opening a file could expose your system to a computer virus or a program known as "spyware," which could capture your passwords or any other information as you type it into your keyboard.
- Use a firewall program. Without it, hackers can take over your computer, access the personal information stored on it, or use it to commit other crimes.
- Use a secure browser – software that encrypts or scrambles information you send over the Internet – to guard your online transactions. When submitting information, look for the "lock" icon on the browser's status bar to be sure your information is secure during transmission.
- Before you dispose of a computer, delete all the personal information it stored with a reliable "wipe" utility program to overwrite the entire hard drive.
- Look for website privacy policies. They should talk about maintaining accuracy, access, security, and control of personal information collected by the site, how the information will be used, and whether it will be provided to third parties. If you don't see a privacy policy – or if you can't understand it – consider doing business elsewhere.

## **Your Laptop– *Don't Store Sensitive Information On It***

Try not to store financial information on your laptop unless absolutely necessary. If you do, use a strong password – a combination of letters (upper and lowercase), numbers, and symbols. A good way to create a strong password is to think of a memorable phrase and use the first letter of each word as your password, converting some letters into numbers that resemble letters. For example, "I love Felix; he's a good cat," would become 1LFHA6c. Don't use an automatic log-in feature that saves your user name and password, and always log off when you're finished. That way, if your laptop is stolen, it's harder for a thief to access your personal information.

## **File Sharing–**

For information about file sharing see "File Sharing: A Fair Share? Maybe Not" and "Spyware", publications from the FTC at: [www.consumer.gov/idtheft](http://www.consumer.gov/idtheft)