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BACK TO SCHOOL: STUDENTS—AND SCHOOLS—NEED TO TAKE “ID THEFT PREVENTION 101”

Educational Institutions Responsible for 20 Percent of Nation’s Data Breaches

Mt. Laurel, N.J. – September 4, 2008 – Summer may be coming to a close, but ID theft season is heating up. The back-to-school season presents ID thieves with a new crop of unknowing students ready to make many mistakes that could easily turn them into ID theft victims. What a lot of parents fail to realize is that the schools to which they’re sending their children are making ID theft more likely.

According to the ID Theft Resource Center (ITRC.org), so far in 2008, educational institutions have been responsible for more than 90 data breaches, which compromised the personal information of more than 650,000 individuals. This makes up 20 percent of all U.S. data breaches this year.

“Parents need to demand more of their kid’s schools when it comes to proper record management and secure document destruction,” said Al Villamil, President of ShredStation, a leader in residential and small business information destruction. “Careless use of social security numbers and improper disposal of information has become far too common in the educational arena but the legislation and its enforcement are catching up. Schools that aren’t careful are going to be dealing with a lot more than angry parents and a tarnished reputation –they’ll be dealing with some pretty heavy fines.”

The Federal Trade Commission discovered that 31 percent of identity-theft victims fall into the 18-29 age group and college students make up one of the largest targets. If parents take just a few simple measures, they can save countless hours and thousands of dollars. A recent survey conducted by ShredStation, available at myidtheftrisk.com, uncovered that despite being almost one third of the victim population, the 18-29 age group is the least concerned with ID theft. As a result, they do the least to safeguard their private information.

With the new school year in mind, ShredStation wants to alert parents that there are a couple of steps they can take to ensure the school to which they’re sending their children is doing enough:

- 1. Research the school’s policy on the use of Social Security numbers.** Though the practice has been decreasing in recent years, many schools use Social Security numbers as student identifiers –some have been so careless that they use it to publicly post test scores. If the school is misusing SS numbers, file a complaint with the FTC.
- 2. Make sure the school has an auditable policy for the proper storage and destruction of personal records.** If the school can’t tell you right away what type of policy they have in place, they probably aren’t doing enough.

- 3. Research Campus Data Security.** In the past 6 months, 1 in 4 data breaches at colleges and universities has stemmed from a stolen laptop from the registrar's office. While it seems there is little a parent can do in this instance, you can still check with the registrar's office to make sure they have a program in place to protect data on school laptops. Additionally, schools should securely destroy or erase hard drives before disposing of or recycling school computers.

Both parents and students must communicate and be proactive to ensure that they don't become a victim. Recognizing that a school's protection can only go so far, ShredStation has compiled the following tips for parents and students help prevent ID theft:

- **Emphasize data/computer security.** Laptops hold a tremendous amount of personal information that, if compromised, could be a goldmine for an ID thief. Make sure you always password protect your computer and buy a cable to lock it to a stationary object. Engrave your computer if at all possible. Some schools even offer an engraving program for this very reason. Additionally, don't think that because you are on a university network your computer is safe. Run virus scanning software regularly incase any keystroke logging software or viruses have been deliberately planted.
- **Use the cell phone for calls only.** A lot of phones these days are advanced enough to store massive amounts of private information. Never input information about passwords or banking information in your phone. If its lost or stolen, you could be in big trouble.
- **Parents, review your child's credit reports twice a year.** Make it a practice to review your child's credit history after each semester. Not only will it help you to uncover potential illegal use of your child's accounts, you will help your child to better understand the significance of a credit score, how it works and what is required to keep it intact.
- **Avoid credit offers.** Unfortunately, schools allow credit card companies to run rampant on their campuses. A recent study by Chubb Group Insurance Company indicated that half of today's college students receive credit offers daily and upwards of 30 percent of students don't shred the unsolicited offers they receive. Make sure your kids shred all unwanted credit application offers.
- **Be aware of political or survey scams.** Students tend to think that if a group is on school property it is approved by the school -not true. Particularly with this being an election year, students need to be wary of individuals posing as political support group representatives especially ones asking for a lot of personal information. Make sure the group is affiliated with the school and has an office on campus to prove it.
- **Limit the info you post on Social Networking Sites.** Facebook and MySpace have become a common means to communicate with friends and meet new people, but posting too much private information about oneself can make users ID theft targets.
- **Keep up your guard.** This is one area where students are on their own and the school can't do much to help. Your child must be aware of their environment. Don't give out private information over the phone in front of that new roommate you barely know. Be aware of potential "shoulder surfers." When using the library computer, making purchases or using an ATM, be sure your credit cards, bank cards, driver's license, and checks cannot be easily viewed by others.

Despite the 18-29 age group being roughly one third of the total victim population, (according to the Federal Trade Commission), the number of victims under the age of 18 is on the rise. While only five percent of ID theft victims in 2008 were under the age of 18, ID theft cases among this group has increased 78% over the previous year, making it the fastest growing segment of the crime.

About ShredStation, Inc.

Founded in 2005, ShredStation, Inc. is a New Jersey based leader in residential, retail and small business information destruction. Through its three services, ShredStation Express, Ship to ShredStation and ShredStation Vaults, the company provides a variety of secure, convenient and affordable options to meet all information destruction needs of its customers. Services include bulk paper shredding, hard drive destruction, electronic media recycling and console service for recurring paper shredding programs. Regardless of which service a customer chooses, each transaction is backed by a Certificate of Destruction as verification that all sensitive data has been securely destroyed. ShredStation recycles 100 percent of the material it destroys. For more information please visit www.shredstation.com.

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