Surf Responsibly. Data Privacy Day is January 28

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MADISON – It seems like each passing month brings another new online service that promises to "simplify" or "change" your life. With consumers signing onto an increasing number of web-based resources for shopping, banking and sharing information with others, the stakes are high for consumers to protect their personal and banking information online.

Today is Data Privacy Day in Wisconsin, and the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection is asking consumers to think about their digital footprint and to consider ways to tighten the security around their online identity. Governor Scott Walker has issued a proclamation in recognition of this international educational effort to encourage consumers, schools and businesses to make protecting privacy and data a greater priority.

"Data privacy is a shared responsibility, and consumers must play an active role in protecting their own personal data," said Sandy Chalmers, Division Administrator of Trade and Consumer Protection. "One of the most important things you can do is to lock your cell phone and personal devices."

To tighten the security around your digital information:

- **Protect your devices.** Update the operating system and anti-virus software on your devices to target recent viruses and patch any holes that hackers can use to access your system. For added security, set your device to require regular password unlocks.

- **Use secure websites**. Before you enter personal or banking information into a website, make sure the URL starts with "https" rather than "http." The "s" stands for secure.

- **Use two-factor authentication when available.** Two-factor authentication is a security process in which you, the user, provide two means of identification – something you have and something you know. Something you have is typically a physical token, such as a card or a code sent to your smartphone. Something you know is something memorized, such as a personal identification number (PIN) or a password.

- **Always keep your devices in a secure location**. Your smartphone, laptop and tablet contain a wealth of personal information like your contacts, messages and schedules. Know where your devices are at all times and keep them locked away in public.

- **Change your internet passwords frequently.** Use a long combination of numbers, letters and special characters.

- **Protect your email account.** Use a complex password that is specific to your email account. Many websites send password update and account access emails to consumers, so getting a hold of these emails could potentially give a hacker access to all of these online accounts.

- **Think before you post.** Adjust the privacy settings for your social media accounts to block your content from strangers. Remember that sensitive information such as names, birth dates and Social Security numbers posted to social media accounts can be used by scammers to steal your identity.

- **Think before you app.** Before downloading a mobile app, understand what information (your location, access to social networks, etc.) the app accesses to function.

- **Use caution on public networks.** If you are using a public Wi-Fi hotspot to connect to your personal accounts on a mobile device, limit the type of business you conduct and set your device to hide your password character entries.

For additional consumer information or to file a complaint, visit the Consumer Protection Bureau at datcp.wisconsin.gov, send an e-mail to datcphotline@wisconsin.gov or call the Consumer Information Hotline at 800-422-7128.

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