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NEWS RELEASE

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Online Brokerage Accounts: Safeguard Your Money and Personal Information

Boise, Idaho April has been designated as Financial Literacy Month in Idaho by Governor Dirk Kempthorne. The Department of Finance, along with many financial literacy partners, will be providing information, making presentations and holding other events to heighten awareness of the importance of financial literacy among Idahoans.

Online brokerage accounts are just one of the many conveniences that the Internet provides. "But," warns Gavin Gee, Director of the Idaho Department of Finance, "consumers need to take steps to protect their personal information when they go online." Gee offers these tips, adapted from a Securities and Exchange Commission publication, for investors to use.

How Online Identity Theft Can Happen

Many identity thieves use malicious software programs to attack vulnerable computers of online users. Sometimes, these programs will log your key strokes, which allows identity thieves to easily obtain username and password information for any of your online accounts, including your brokerage account.

Other identity thieves "phish" for your personal information. "Phishing" involves the use of fraudulent emails and copy-cat websites to trick you into revealing valuable personal information - such as your account number, your social security number, and the username and password information you use when accessing your account.

But not all identity thieves have gone "high tech." Many still use less sophisticated ways of stealing your personal information, such as looking over your shoulder when you're typing sensitive information or searching through your trash for confidential account information.

How to Protect Yourself Online

You'll need to protect yourself against identity thieves, whether hackers, phishers, or snoops, when you use your online brokerage account. Here are a few suggestions on ways to keep your personal information and money more secure when you go online:

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PROTECTING THE INTEGRITY OF IDAHO FINANCIAL MARKETS

- **Beef Up Your Security.** Personal firewalls and security software packages (with anti-virus, anti-spam, and spyware detection features) are a must-have for those who engage in online financial transactions. Make sure your computer has the latest security patches, and make sure that you access your online brokerage account only on a secure web page using encryption. The website address of a secure website connection starts with "https" instead of just "http" and has a key or closed padlock in the status bar (which typically appears in the lower right-hand corner of your screen).
- **Be Careful What You Download.** When you download a program or file from an unknown source, you risk loading malicious software programs on your computer. Think twice before you click on a pop-up advertisement or download a "free" game or gadget.
- **Use Your Own Computer.** It's generally safer to access your online brokerage account from your own computer than from other computers. If you use a computer other than your own, for example, you won't know if it contains viruses or spyware.
- **Don't Respond to Emails Requesting Personal Information.** Legitimate entities will not ask you to provide or verify sensitive information through a non-secure means, such as email. If you have reason to believe that your financial institution actually does need personal information from you, pick up the phone and call the company yourself - using the number in your rolodex, not the one the email provides!
- **Be Smart About Your Password.** The best passwords are ones that are difficult to guess. Try using a password that consists of a combination of numbers, letters (both upper case and lower case), punctuation, and special characters. You should change your password regularly and use a different password for each of your accounts.
- **Use Extra Caution with Wireless Connections.** Wireless networks may not provide as much security as wired Internet connections. In fact, many "hotspots" - wireless networks in public areas like airports, hotels and restaurants - reduce their security so it's easier for individuals to access and use these wireless networks.
- **Log Out Completely.** Closing or minimizing your browser or typing in a new web address when you're done using your online account may not be enough to prevent others from gaining access to your account information. Instead, click on the "log out" button to terminate your online session. In addition, you shouldn't permit your browser to "remember" your username and password information.

A link to the SEC publication and more information on identity theft can be obtained by visiting the Department's website at finance.idaho.gov or calling the Department at (208) 332-8002 or toll free within Idaho at 888-346-3378. The Department is also offering speakers who can visit classes or organizations interested in learning more about personal finance topics. Just contact the Department at the number above.

Department of Finance Press Releases and other information can be found on the Internet via the worldwide web at <http://finance.idaho.gov> and may be obtained by contacting the Department at (208) 332-8000 or Idaho toll-free at 1-888-346-3378.