



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

1600 PACIFIC HIGHWAY, ROOM 335, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA 92101-2470

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: April 4, 2006

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT: **IDENTITY THEFT RISK ASSESSMENT PLAN** (District: All)

SUMMARY:

Overview

The County of San Diego Methamphetamine Strike Force is reporting a spike in meth fueled identity crimes in the region. In 2005, local prosecutors witnessed a 30 percent jump in identity theft cases involving the intense stimulant. That meth addiction lies at the root of a majority of identity theft cases is no surprise to drug treatment professionals and law enforcement officials. The powerful drug is highly-addictive and over stimulates the central nervous system. It is not uncommon for meth addicts stay awake for days at a time, hacking into computers, stealing mail, counterfeiting checks, forging documents and acquiring goods to sell for quick cash to feed their habit, according to local investigators who specialize in identity crimes.

Numerous County departments collect and retain information about employees and the public, including names, addresses, Social Security numbers and credit card numbers. In the wrong hands, this information can be used for fraudulent purposes. Recent security breeches at local public agencies demonstrate that government is not immune to the threat of identity theft. The need exists for the County to proactively identify and eliminate any department vulnerabilities to identity theft. Today's action will develop an identity theft risk assessment plan for all County departments that, once implemented, will identify areas of potential weakness. Ultimately, the plan will enable the County to remedy all vulnerabilities to ensure that the public has the highest level of protection possible against identity theft.

Recommendation(s)

SUPERVISORS DIANNE JACOB AND GREG COX AND DISTRICT ATTORNEY BONNIE M. DUMANIS:

Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to review all department policies and procedures related to the storage and destruction of personal information and develop an identity theft risk assessment plan that will identify all vulnerabilities and report back to the Board in 90 days with a proposed plan and its estimated costs.

Fiscal Impact

This action can be performed within existing resources.

Business Impact Statement

N/A

Advisory Board Statement

N/A

BACKGROUND:

The County of San Diego Methamphetamine Strike Force is reporting a spike in meth fueled identity crimes in the region. In 2005, local prosecutors witnessed a 30 percent jump in identity theft cases involving the drug. Identity theft already ranks among the fastest growing crimes in the region. In 2004, there were more than 1,500 reported cases of identity theft in the County, with an estimated 1,125 of those cases connected to the meth trade, according to prosecutors.

That meth addiction lies at the root of a majority of identity theft cases is no surprise to drug treatment professional and law enforcement officials. The powerful drug is highly-addictive and over stimulates the central nervous system. Many users quickly develop an insatiable need for more of the drug to feed their increased cravings for it. It is not uncommon for meth addicts to stay awake for days at a time, hacking into computers, stealing mail, counterfeiting checks, forging documents and acquiring goods to sell for quick cash to feed their habit, according to local investigators who specialize in identity crimes.

Last year, Meth Strike Force officials surveyed recovering meth users in San Diego County to learn more about the connection between the drug and identity theft. One user estimated that 95 percent of addicts trade stolen information for drugs. Another meth user offered this advice to those seeking to protect themselves from thieves: "A dumpster is a box of presents," she warned, "...shred everything."

On average, an identity theft victim will spend 330 hours and \$1,400 in out-of-pocket expenses to regain control over his or her financial situation, according to the San Diego-based Identity Theft Resource Center (ITRC). These statistics do not include time lost from work. Recent studies indicate that more than 19,000 Americans are victimized by identity thieves each day.

The damage wrought by identity theft is not limited to the individual victim. The business community loses \$15,000 per compromised identity, according to the ITRC. Federal statistics indicate that identity theft costs the national economy upward of \$53 billion.

Numerous County departments collect and retain personal information about employees and the public, including names, addresses, Social Security numbers, credit card numbers and other account numbers. In the wrong hands, this information could be used for criminal purposes, including fraudulently establishing credit, running up debt or taking over existing financial accounts.

Recent security breaches at local public agencies demonstrate that government is, in no way, immune to the threat of identity theft. Last year, 33,000 current and retired County employees were exposed to potential identity theft when hackers broke into the computer system of the San Diego County Employees Retirement Association. Last month, an employee of the City of San

Diego Water Department admitted to stealing personal information from the department's billing database.

Currently, an accounting supervisor with the San Diego Superior Court is accused of stealing more than \$60,000 in cash, checks and credit card receipts. Prosecutors say the employee may have stolen fees and fines totaling hundreds of thousands of dollars over the past 10 to 15 years.

The immediate need exists for the County to develop an identity theft risk assessment plan for all County departments that, once implemented, will identify areas of potential weakness. Ultimately, the plan will enable the County to remedy vulnerabilities to ensure that the public has the highest level of protection possible against identity theft.

Respectfully submitted,

DIANNE JACOB
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GREG COX
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District Attorney

