

U.S. Web sites aiding identity thieves

by UPI

ANNAPOLIS, Md. -- Online investigations in Maryland and other states found troves of Americans' private information vulnerable to identity thieves. Federal, state and local officials warn individuals to guard private information but that information -- including full Social Security numbers -- is commonplace in file rooms and Web sites run by various levels of the government, The Washington Post said Wednesday. "This is very dangerous," said Maryland Attorney General Douglas F. Gansler said. A Washington Post investigation uncovered Gansler's Social Security number on a Maryland government Web site. The Washington Post investigation also found Social Security numbers of football great Troy Aikman and former U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell. Federal courts banned Social Security numbers from public documents in 2001, several states enacted similar legislation and a presidential task force last spring ordered federal agencies to "reduce the unnecessary use" of Social Security numbers, which it said was "the most valuable commodity for an identity thief," the Post reported. However, full Social Security numbers appear on documents prior to the prohibiting legislation, serving up untold numbers of Americans to potential identity theft. The most recent data available from the Federal Trade Commission said roughly 8.3 million Americans had their identities stolen in 2005.

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