

As you know, the Privacy Office occasionally issues tips for the purpose of assisting you in making informed decisions in your “away from work” life. The following tip is for that purpose (we all know that we cannot use the internet for shopping, managing bank accounts, etc. while on the job and with State equipment!)

Privacy Tip #50 Protect Yourself Online

The Internet is a global communications network that enables business and consumers to connect around the clock, from virtually anywhere in the world. Most of us are regular consumers of online shopping and even banking offerings. With this amazing convenience also comes new risks and threats to our personally identifiable information (PII).

According to Privacy Rights Clearinghouse¹, here are some things you can do to become a better online consumer and protect your PII:

- ✓ Shop with familiar, reliable companies. If you are not familiar with a company, do research to see if they are a legitimate business. <http://www.bbb.org/us/>
- ✓ Shop at secure sites. Not sure how to tell if a site is secure? Look for “https” in the Web site address. The “s” that is displayed after “http” indicates that your connection to that Web page is secure. Often the entire Web site is not secure, but the pages where you are entering PII is. In those cases, the “s” won’t be displayed until you actually move to the order page. You can also look for a closed padlock or unbroken key displayed at the bottom of your screen. If that lock is open or the key is broken, you should assume it is not a secure connection.
- ✓ Use caution when providing your social security number – consider the source of the request. Online shopping merchants should never ask for this number but a valid social security number is required when opening online bank accounts or conducting other financial services transactions.
- ✓ Read the Web Site’s Privacy and Security Statements before doing business with them. Know what information they collect about you, how they use it, and if they share with third parties. Look for merchants who are members of “seal of approval” programs and implement voluntary guidelines for privacy-related policies.

¹ Privacy Rights Clearinghouse: <http://www.privacyrights.org/fs/fs23-shopping.htm>

- ✓ Always pay by credit card or PayPal, not a check card or debit card. Check cards and debit cards can expose your bank account information. Credit cards or PayPal offer greater protection in the event something goes wrong.