

# PROFIT ALERT COMMUNIQUE

● Investing ● Banking & Credit ● Financial Planning ● Taxes ● Money Matters

ISSUE 5

VOLUME 8

## MONEY

### Save Your “Green” By Going Green

How can you live lightly on earth and save money at the same time? “Going green” may be the answer. “Going Green,” a relatively new term, means practicing an environmentally friendly and ecologically responsible lifestyle as well as making decisions to help protect the environment and sustain natural resources.

There are lots of reasons to consider going green — too much trash, greenhouse gases, air and water pollution, damage to the ozone layer, and, of course, saving money. For example, switching all the light bulbs you from conventional incandescent light bulbs to compact fluorescent light (CFL) bulbs could save about \$40 over the life of the bulb. Other examples include:

#### Saving Energy To Save Money

✓ Set your thermostat a few degrees lower in the winter and a few degrees higher in the summer to save on heating and cooling costs.

✓ Install compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) when your older incandescent bulbs burn out.

✓ Unplug appliances when you’re not using them. Or, use a “smart” power strip that senses when appliances are off and cuts “phantom” or “vampire” energy use.

✓ Wash clothes in cold water whenever possible. As much as 85 percent of the energy used to machine-wash clothes goes to heating the water.

✓ Use a drying rack or clothesline to save the energy otherwise used during machine drying.

#### Save Water To Save Money

● Take shorter showers to reduce water use. This will lower your water and heating bills too.

● Install a low-flow showerhead. They don’t cost much, and the water and energy savings can quickly pay back your investment.

● Make sure you have a faucet aerator on each faucet. These inexpensive appliances conserve heat and water, while keeping water pressure high.

● Plant drought-tolerant native plants in your garden. Many plants need minimal watering. Find out which occur naturally in your area.

#### Eat Smart And Save Money

■ If you eat meat, add one meatless meal a week. Meat costs a lot at the store—and it’s even more expensive when you consider the related environmental and health costs.

■ Buy locally raised, humane, and organic meat, eggs, and dairy whenever you can.

■ Purchasing from local farmers keeps money in the local economy.

### INTERNET ACCESS

Our website is up and can readily be used by our subscribers. It will be faster for you to get your newsletter on the web. You can print it too. However, we will continue to mail you the hard copy. Your password is provided below:

[www.emarketupdate.com](http://www.emarketupdate.com)

**Username = FTWA**

**Password = 2525**

Whatever your diet, eat low on the food chain. This is especially true for seafood.

#### Skip The Bottled Water And Save Money

✓ Use a water filter to purify tap water instead of buying bottled water. Not only is bottled water expensive, but it generates large amounts of container waste.

✓ Bring a reusable water bottle, preferably aluminum rather than plastic, with you when traveling or at work.

#### Make Your Own Cleaning Supplies And Save Money

● You can make very effective, non-toxic cleaning products whenever you need them. All you need are a few simple ingredients like baking soda, vinegar, lemon, and soap.

● Making your own cleaning products saves money, time, and pack-

aging-not to mention your indoor air quality.

Other good ways to go green include reusing products, instead of throwing them away, and recycling items made of materials such as glass, metal, plastic, or paper. It is estimated that 75% of our waste is recyclable, and most of the U.S. population has access to curbside or recycling programs. It is easy to safely dispose of many products. Others, such as car batteries, cell phones, televisions, paints, oils, and solvents, require special handling. Many of these products can be donated or recycled through local government recycling centers and hazardous household item collection days, charitable organizations, or even electronics retailers.

Many utility companies now offer curbside recycling programs that provide U.S. households with a responsible and convenient way to recycle materials. To locate information on recycling services and efforts in your area, call the Earth 911 toll free hotline, 1-800-CLEANUP (253-2687) or visit [www.earth911.org](http://www.earth911.org).



**Free Up Money Your From Your Service Providers**

Need some extra cash? Are monthly bills from your service providers keeping you from building your savings? If so, you're not alone. Millions of Americans are in the same boat. However, there are some steps you can take now to free up money from your service providers that could give you the cash you need to build an emergency fund or to pad your retirement nest egg.

**Bill-Paying And Banking**

Consider using online bill- pay; this option eliminates the cost of stamps, checks and envelopes and usually

saves you time. Banks or credit unions may even waive service fees if you pay online.

If you have your paycheck, disability, or retirement check directly deposited into your account, your bank may reduce service fees. Automated withdrawals also can save you time and money. Funds are taken directly from your account by your service provider. It's common practice for the provider to provide you with an incentive to do this. However, if you request automated withdrawals to pay your bills, you need to track your spending carefully so that you do not overdraw your accounts.

Avoid using payday loans, cash advance, or title loans; these options are extremely expensive

**Utility Budget Plans**

You can work with your service provider so that your monthly bill is based on an average of the previous year's monthly bills. This is usually called "level billing." However, if you exceed the budgeted amount, you could end up owing money at the end of the current year or your fixed payment will increase next year. In some cases, a utility company may make an adjustment during the year, if usage is greatly exceeding the estimated amount. This strategy provides short term relief to the monthly budget if utility costs are rising.

**Lower Insurance Premiums**

Whenever possible, you should your increase deductibles in order to lower premiums. Make sure that you have enough money in an emergency fund to cover the deductible, should the need arise.

You can also check to see whether you have duplicate or excess coverage that you can eliminate. And certain policies such as disability insur-

ance require a waiting period. Increasing the length of the waiting period also tends to lower premiums. Get The Most From Your Grocery Budget

Last year food prices hit record highs and if the first three months of 2012 are any indication, they may do so again this year. For the third consecutive month, global food costs rose in March. And according to analysts, food is likely to keep rising in 2012.

As the cost of food continues to rise, it can be a challenge to make healthy food choices and stay within your food budget. Here are some tips to help you get the most from your grocery budget:

- ✓ Take an inventory of the food you already have in your home. Plan your meals for the week, keeping in mind what you already have in your pantry.
- ✓ Make a shopping list and stick to it.
- ✓ Eat BEFORE going to the grocery store to avoid making impulse purchases. When you're hungry, everything looks good.
- ✓ Compare unit prices (cost per ounce or pound) to determine if you are getting the best deal.
- ✓ Buy the generic store brand versions of foods.
- ✓ Take advantage of store loyalty savings programs, as well as clipping coupons and online discounts. Only take advantage of the deal if you know you will eat the discounted item. It's not a deal if the food goes to waste.
- ✓ Shop the perimeter of the store for nutrient dense foods. Processed and packaged foods tend to be more expensive.

✓ Visit your local farmer's market to find fresh produce. Arrive early to get the best selection or late to get the best deals. Fresh food spoils quickly so don't buy more than you can eat or freeze. Find your local farmers market at [search.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets](http://search.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets)

✓ Shop for foods that are in season. When the supply is plentiful, the prices tend to be lower.

✓ Bring sturdy canvas bags and transport your food. Some stores offer discounts to customers for bringing their own bags.

✓ Reuse leftovers for lunch or casseroles. For more grocery shopping tips visit [www.extension.org](http://www.extension.org) and [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov).

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**How To Avoid Auto Repair Scams**

When your vehicle needs repairs, you don't need a crash course in auto mechanics, but you should know how to find a reliable shop and mechanic. Professional auto mechanics recommend following a few key pointers to ensure that your automobile gets fixed without a glitch.

While many auto repair shops are legitimate, there are always those unscrupulous few that end up sucking thousands of unnecessary repair dollars from consumers. In 2011, Better Business Bureau (BBB) received more than 14,500 complaints against auto repair services and fielded more than 1.5 million inquiries from consumers looking to find a reliable business in the industry. Many of the complaints received by BBB fell under billing, service, and refund and exchange issues.

Whenever you take your car to the shop, never try to diagnose the prob-

lem yourself. Describe the symptoms and ensure that the work cannot begin until you have a written estimate and given your okay.

BBB recommends considering the following advice when taking your car in for auto repair services:

**Check your warranty.** If you have a problem with your vehicle while it's still under warranty, follow the manufacturer's instructions, which may require that repairs be made at an authorized dealership.

**Get recommendations.** If you're looking for a qualified, independent shop, ask friends for recommendations, or request a list of BBB Accredited Businesses that do the type of auto repair you need. Be sure to check with BBB about the shop's reliability at [www.bbb.org/search](http://www.bbb.org/search). Look for shops that display certification. For major work, such as brakes, transmission or engine repair, you'll need to find a shop employing a specialist.

**Ask all the questions.** Don't be embarrassed to request explanations. Don't rush the mechanic into making an on-the-spot diagnosis of the problem. Ask to be called and apprised of the problem, course of action, and cost of work before any work begins.

**Before authorizing repairs, get a written estimate for parts and labor.** Tell the shop to get your permission before making additional repairs. Ensure you receive notification by having the service manager write a request on the bottom of the repair order. Give phone numbers where you can be reached and, before you leave, be sure to understand all shop policies regarding labor rates, guarantees, and acceptable methods of payment.

**Get it all in writing.** When you pick

up your vehicle, get an explanation of all work completed and get all guarantees in writing. Ask that any major new parts that have been installed be pointed out to you. Your repair bill should be itemized so, if a problem occurs later, you can prove the item is covered by the guarantee.



**The Gold Rush May Have Left You Inadequately Insured**

Rising gold prices might mean that your jewelry — bracelets, necklaces, etc. — made of the precious metal are worth a lot more than they were just a few years ago, and that could mean that your insurance coverage might be inadequate, Insurer carrier the Hartford found that in a sampling of 100 jewelry claims in the last three months of 2011, 40 percent were undervalued. Insurers recommend that jewelry be reappraised every three to five years to make sure your insurance coverage is correct.

**STOCK & INVESTING**

**3 Drug Stocks Set For Healthy Profits**

2012 has so far been a good year for the biotechnology and Drug industries. A number of stocks surged in the first three months of the year based on clinical trial results, FDA approval, FDA Advisory Committee's recommendations, partnerships with big pharmaceuticals, acquisitions, and so on.

Pharmaceuticals, in particular, have gotten hot again as biotech stocks are waiting for drug approval for their anti-obesity drugs, as well as drugs to treat other conditions and diseases.

Here are three pharmaceutical com-

panies — 2 of which have anti-obesity drugs waiting for FDA approval — that have the potential for some healthy long-term profits. Each stock is currently trading below \$5 a share.

**Orexigen Therapeutics, Inc. (OREX; Nasdaq; \$4.06):** This La Jolla, California-based biopharmaceutical company is focused on the treatment of obesity. Its leading product is Contrave, and its second product candidate for obesity treatment is Empatic.

Contrave has completed Phase 3 clinical trials and Orexigen has submitted a New Drug Application to the FDA for review. In February, the Company also reached agreement with the FDA on a Special Protocol Assessment for the Contrave cardiovascular outcomes trial. The Company's other product, Empatic, has completed Phase 2 clinical trials.

FDA approval of Contrave could put the first new weight-loss drug on the market since 1999. Orexigen's shares are trading around \$4.06 with a 52-week trading range of \$1.22-\$5.14.

**Arena Pharmaceuticals, Inc. (ARNA; Nasdaq; \$3.07):** Arena Pharmaceuticals is a clinical-stage biopharmaceutical company focused on discovering, developing and commercializing oral drugs that target G protein-coupled receptors, or GPCRs, in four major therapeutic areas: cardiovascular, central nervous system, inflammatory and metabolic diseases.

Arena's advanced drug candidate is Lorcaserin hydrochloride, for weight management, which has completed two pivotal Phase III clinical trials. The Company's wholly owned subsidiary, Arena Pharmaceuticals GmbH, has granted Eisar, Inc. rights to commercialize lorcaserin in the United States and its territories subject to FDA approval of the lorcaserin New Drug Application.

Arena Pharmaceutical shares are currently trading around \$3.07, with a 52-week trading range of \$1.21-\$3.47.

**NuPathe, Inc. (PATH; Nasdaq; \$3.43):** NuPathe is an emerging biopharmaceutical company focused on innovative neuroscience solutions for diseases of the central nervous system, including neurological and psychiatric disorders. The Company's lead product candidate, NP101, is an active, single-use, transdermal sumatriptan patch being developed for the treatment of migraine.

In addition to NP101, NuPathe has two proprietary product candidates in preclinical development: NP201 for the continuous symptomatic treatment of Parkinson's disease and NP202 for the long-term treatment of schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. Nupathe is actively seeking partnerships to maximize the commercial potential for our pipeline products in the United States and territories throughout the world.

If approved by the FDA, NuPathe's lead product candidate, NP101, will be the first migraine patch. The patch uses iontophoretic technology to deliver the most frequently prescribed migraine drug through the skin in a rapid and controlled manner, regardless of the existence of the gastrointestinal issues so common in migraine.

NuPathe shares have gained around 72% year-to-date and are currently trading \$3.43 a share with a 52-week trading range of \$1.52 - \$8.95.

**CREDIT**

**Just Say No To Unsolicited Checks And Credit Offers**

If you cash an unsolicited check you've received in the mail, you could be agreeing to pay for prod-

ucts or services you don't want or need. In addition those "guarantees" for credit cards or loans, without consideration of credit history, are probably a scam. Legitimate lenders never guarantee credit.

Legitimate offers of credit come in the form of "convenience checks," which credit card companies enclose with your monthly statement. However, these convenience checks may carry higher fees, a higher interest rate, and other restrictions. If you don't want the checks, be sure to shred them to protect yourself from "dumpster divers" and identity thieves.



**Ease The Pain At The Pump With Gas Rebates**

Credit cards might be able to help reduce the pain of gasoline prices climbing above \$4 a gallon this spring. Cards from gasoline companies and credit-card companies can provide cash back, gift cards or fuel-credit incentive programs based on the purchases made. If you fill up at the same station, you might want to look at a card offered by that brand. If you fill up at different stations or look for the least expensive gasoline, a bank-sponsored card might be the way to go. Regardless, you should be sure to pay attention to the fine print because reward details can be confusing. Also, be sure to pay off any balance every month to avoid the high interest rates the cards usually carry.



**Ten Best Credit Card Deals Nationwide**

The following ten credit-card deals are available as of this writing for customers who pay off their balances each month and customers who don't. (V=variable)

Issuer	Rate	Annual Fee
Grace Period		

■ **Amalgamated Bank of Chicago**

7.50% (V)	\$37	25/billing
1-800-723-0303		

■ **Citizens Trust Bank**

9.25% (V)	\$0	25/billing
1-404-659-5959		

■ **First Command Bank**

10.25%	\$0	30/billing
1-888-763-7600		

■ **Iberiabank**

10.25% (V)	\$0	25/billing
1-800-980-2265		

■ **Simmons First National Bank**

10.25% (V)	\$0	25/billing
1-800-636-5151		

■ **Nevada State Bank**

12.25% (V)	\$0	25/billing
1-800-727-4743		

■ **Zions Bank**

12.25% (V)	\$0	25/billing
1-888-758-5349		

■ **State Farm Bank**

14.74% (V)	\$0	24/billing
1-877-734-2265		

■ **Commerce Bank**

15.24% (V)	\$0	25/billing
1-800-645-2103		

■ **First Hawaiian Bank**

16.24% (V)	\$0	25/billing
1-800-489-2660		



**Identifying And Stopping Identity Theft And Fraud**

Identity thieves steal your personal information to commit fraud. They can damage your credit status and cost you time and money to restore your good name. Here are some warning signs to look for and help

you avoid fraud:

✓ You are asked for your bank account or credit card number.

✓ Someone you don't know offers you the chance to receive a credit card, loan, prize, lottery, or other valuable item, but asks you for personal data to claim it.

✓ The solicitation looks like a government document and suggests that contest winnings or unclaimed assets are yours for a small fee. (Uncle Sam doesn't solicit money from citizens.)

✓ Someone you don't know asks you to send money or money orders to claim a prize, lottery, credit card, loan, or other valuable offer.

✓ An unknown caller claiming to be a lawyer or in law enforcement offers to help you get your money back (for a fee).

✓ The deal is only good "for today" or a short time.

✓ A "repair person" suddenly finds a dangerous defect in your car or home.

✓ You are given little or no time to read a contract.

✓ A sale item is suddenly unavailable, but a much better item" is available for slightly more money.

✓ Someone is trying to scare you into purchasing credit protection plans.

**To reduce your risk of becoming a victim, follow these tips:**

- Don't carry your Social Security card in your wallet or write your number on your checks. Only give out your SSN when absolutely necessary.

- Protect Your Pin. Never write a

PIN on a credit/debit card or on a slip of paper kept in your wallet.

- Watch out for "shoulder surfers." Use your free hand to shield the keypad when typing your passwords on computers and at ATMs.

- Collect mail promptly. Ask the post office to put your mail on hold when you are away from home for more than a day or two.

- Pay attention to your billing cycles. If bills or financial statements are late, contact the sender.

Keep your receipts. Ask for carbons and incorrect charge slips as well. Promptly compare receipts with account statements. Watch for unauthorized transactions.

- Tear up or shred unwanted receipts, credit offers, account statements, expired cards, etc., to prevent "dumpster divers from getting your personal information.

- Store personal information in a safe place at home and at work. Don't leave it lying around.

- Don't respond to unsolicited requests for personal information in the mail, over the phone, or online.

- Install firewalls and virus-detection software on your home computer.

- Check your credit report source once a year. Check it more frequently if you suspect someone has gained access to your account information.

**HEALTH**

**10 Ways To Save Money On Health Care**

Imagine perusing the Sunday newspaper and finding coupons to save on your health care. Imagine \$20 off

your next prescription or \$50 off your next doctor visit. The old saying “if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is” doesn’t apply in this case.

Health care premiums are a large expense for most families, and they’re growing larger each year, say financial planning experts. The good news is there are still ways to save money on health care without compromising your health. Here are 10 top tips you can start implementing today:

**Consider mail order medication.** How long would you hesitate if shoes or a round of golf was buy one, get one free? Probably not very long. So why not take advantage of similar offers for medications you take? There are a number of mail-order pharmacies offering different deals. Check with your health insurance provider to see what they offer.

**Switch to generic.** Talk to your doctor about switching from a brand name drug to a generic alternative. A recent study showed that generic drugs are 30- to 80-percent less expensive than their brand-name counterparts.

**Hang with the in crowd.** The health-care in crowd means in your network. Some health plans offer options for both in- and out-of-network options, but you’ll likely pay more for seeing an out-of-network doctor or going to an out-of-network facility. Emergencies happen, and you may have to roam outside of your network on occasion, but stay in network whenever possible. You may also want to consider a Health Maintenance Organization plan.

**Visit a digital doctor.** It may feel like you’re starring in an episode of the Jetsons, but more and more doctors are consulting with patients digitally, using tools ranging from email to Web video to discuss mild, simple conditions with patients. Doctors

charge far less for digital visits than for the in-person version. The fee is often around \$20 to \$35. Keep in mind that if your ailment is something you would have gone to the emergency room for prior to the Internet age, you should still go to the emergency room.

**Focus on wellness.** With health care costs skyrocketing, companies are encouraging employees to take better care of themselves and reduce health care expenses by adopting healthy eating and exercise habits, stopping smoking and reducing stress. Check with your employer to see what wellness programs are available to you.

**Don’t leave money on the table.** If you put money in a Flexible Spending Account, be sure not to forget about it because if you don’t spend it by the deadline, you’ll lose it. Know the deadlines at your company, and know what expenses qualify for reimbursement. It’s your money, so spend it.

**Emergency versus non-emergency.** If you have a serious, life-threatening medical situation, the emergency room is the place for you. However, don’t dash down to the local hospital for minor conditions your family doctor can handle. The difference in what you pay could be hundreds, or even thousands, of dollars.

**Evaluate your policy.** You don’t want to be over insured or under insured - you want your insurance to be just right. If you purchase too much insurance, you’re spending money that might be better off going into a special fund in case of emergency. If you’re under insured, you may end up without important coverage. Review your plan each year to allow for family or health changes.

**Look for errors.** Studies show that approximately 80 percent of bills

from health care providers contain errors. Make sure you aren’t paying for someone else’s mistake.

**Choose plans to meet specific needs.** You’re part of a family of five, but that doesn’t mean you all need to be on the same plan, or even with the same insurer. You may find you can save money by choosing specific plans to meet each individual’s needs. Don’t drop any coverage until you’re sure you’re approved and covered for new insurance elsewhere.



### Five Ways To Prevent Unhealthy Weight Gain And Protect Your Heart

In a letter to Jean-Baptiste Leroy in 1789, Benjamin Franklin wrote, “In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes.” Apparently Mr. Franklin wasn’t aware of another “certainty” — gaining weight as we age. It’s a fact, as we age our mass diminishes, we slow down and we need fewer calories to maintain our weight. Before you know it, our belts are tighter and our clothes no longer fit.

While it’s relatively easy to explain away a few additional pounds, consider this: A weight gain of two pounds a year adds up to 20 pounds in 20 years. And those extra pounds increase the risk of developing type 2 diabetes and hypertension, which increase the risk of heart disease. So in order to prevent unhealthy weight gain, you need to eat smarter.

Here are five “suggestions” that could help you prevent unhealthy weight gain.

**Eat less of the same foods.** Instead of changing what you eat, just eat less of it. You can fool your brain by using smaller plates. That’s because a small plate that’s full,

looks like a lot more food than it is. And because restaurant portions are generally large, you might try putting half the food from your plate into a takeout box before you take the first bite.

**Eat more vegetables.** Dieticians recommend eating twice the amount of vegetables as proteins. In addition to providing essential nutrients, vegetables will also make you feel full.

It's relatively easy to add more vegetables to your diet. For example, you can add tomatoes or leftover cooked broccoli to scrambled eggs. You might also add a package of frozen vegetables into soups, stews or casseroles. And try topping a frozen pizza with sliced, sauteed zucchini.

**Consume more protein.** Protein helps prevent loss of muscle and bone. Geriatricians at the Cleveland Clinic recommend that adults eat five to seven ounces of protein per day. One ounce of protein is equivalent to one ounce of lean meat, poultry or seafood; 1 egg; 1/4 can cooked beans or peas; 1/4 ounce nuts or seeds; or one tablespoon peanut butter. Make sure your meat or fish is baked, broiled, grilled or roasted, rather than fried.

**Cut back on sodium.** Salt retains water, making you feel bloated and raising your blood pressure. Prepared foods are the primary source of extra sodium. If you "heat it and eat it," it probably has too much sodium, unless it says "low sodium" on the label.

**Give yourself a treat.** Unless you have superhuman willpower, it will be impossible to resist an occasional treat. That's not a problem, so long as it's not often, and in small amounts.

Whole fruit is a healthy treat alternative, but fruit juice is not. A glass of

orange juice has several times the calories of an orange, without the same vitamins, minerals and fiber.

## RETIREMENT AND PLANING

### The Check Is Not In The Mail

If you receive federal benefit payments such as Social Security or other government pensions — or you will soon — don't be looking forward to receiving your check in the mail. Instead, you should start planning for direct deposit. That's because the U.S. Department of the Treasury is phasing out paper checks for federal benefits in favor of all-electronic delivery via direct deposit by March 1, 2013.

According to the Treasury Department, the change to direct deposit will benefit consumers because electronic payments are safer, easier and more reliable than paper checks. In addition, people who use electronic deposit can "rest more easily" knowing that their funds will appear in their bank account sooner than if they received a paper check.

So, what does this change mean for you? First of all, if you haven't yet applied for federal benefits, when you do apply you must receive the funds electronically. That requirement began for new recipients on May 1, 2011. If you already have your federal benefits direct-deposited into a bank account, the Treasury Department's change will not affect you.

If you currently receive your benefits via paper check, you must switch to an electronic payment March 1, 2013. To start, you need to provide the routing number for your bank (ask a customer service representative if you need to) and you account

number. If you don't select an electronic payment option by March 1, 2013, you'll receive your benefits on the Direct Express card, a prepaid debit card that can be used to pay for purchases and access cash at ATMs.

If you don't have a bank account and your funds are direct-deposited onto a prepaid card (also known as a stored value card) instead of a bank account, understand that the card has potential benefits as well as potential costs and concerns, including the inability to establish a relationship with a local bank that can be handy if you need other bank services. Now is a good time to begin looking for a low- or no-cost checking or savings account. Also, some financial institutions will waive fees for customers who have regular direct deposits.

You can get more information about the Direct Express card and the new rules, by calling the Treasury Department's toll-free helpline at 1-800-333-1795, or visit [www.GoDirect.org](http://www.GoDirect.org).

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### Seniors Beware... Financial Fraud Is On The Rise

Each year millions of senior citizens are victimized by financial fraud or theft of money, property or valuable personal information. Many times an adult child or other relative is responsible. Other situations may involve trusted individuals, such as caregivers, legal guardians, investment advisors or new "friends." And because the types of abuse may differ widely, it's important to take a variety of precautions. Here are some tips to help you protect yourself and your loved ones.

**Choose an advisor carefully.** If you're considering hiring a new broker, attorney, accountant or other professional, even someone recom-

mended by a friend or relative, it's best to independently look into that person's background and reputation before investing money or paying for services. For example, you can confirm that this person is properly registered or licensed and has a clean record with regulators and other consumers. When in doubt about how to research this information, ask your state Attorney General's office or local consumer protection agency for guidance. Make sure you not only understand the role an advisor will be playing, but trust that this individual will do what's best for you and your finances. Don't be afraid to ask questions or say no. After all, it's your money!

**Be careful with powers of attorney.** At some point, you may want to have a power of attorney, a legal document that authorizes another person to transact business on your behalf. While powers of attorney can be very helpful, be careful who you name as your representative. Powers of attorney can be easily misused because they allow the appointed person to step into your shoes and do everything you can do, including taking money from your account and borrowing money in your name. You should consult an attorney who can prepare or review the document for you.

**Protect your personal financial information.** Never give out your bank account numbers, Social Security numbers, PINs (personal identification numbers), passwords or other sensitive information unless you initiate the contact. These requests may come from an unsolicited phone caller, letter writer, e-mailer or a person who shows up at your door. Be especially wary of someone who congratulates you about winning a (bogus) prize or lottery but first demands payment for taxes or other fees.

Also, keep your checkbook, account

statements, and other sensitive information in a safe place. And shred paper documents containing sensitive information that is no longer needed.

**Keep an eye on your credit card and bank account activity.** Review your account statements as soon as you receive them and look for unauthorized or suspicious transactions, which should be reported to your bank immediately.

**Take your time when deciding on a major financial decision or investment.** Make sure you understand the transaction and ask questions if you don't. If you need to, ask a lawyer or financial advisor to help you understand the documents and discuss what's best for you. "Walk away from anyone who says you must make a decision or otherwise do "act now."

**Be wary of offers involving reverse mortgages.** These loans enable homeowners age 62 or older to borrow money from the equity in their homes. However, reverse mortgages can be complex products with a variety of risks and costs, and there are many reports of schemes by unscrupulous individuals using deceptive offers and high-pressure tactics to steer senior citizens into using the funds from a reverse mortgage for inappropriate or costly loans or investments. For guidance on the responsible use of a reverse mortgage, including how to locate a lender or a housing counselor approved by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Federal Housing Administration, start at [www.hud.gov/offices/hsg/sfh/hecm/rmtopen.cfm](http://www.hud.gov/offices/hsg/sfh/hecm/rmtopen.cfm) or call 1-800-569-4287.

**Beware of callers asking for money or information.** If you'd like to reduce the number of telemarketing calls you receive, consider signing up for the national Do Not Call Registry (call 1-888-382-1222 or

visit [www.donotcall.gov](http://www.donotcall.gov)). If you are on this list, be suspicious of calls from any company or organization that you have reason to believe is not eligible to contact you under the registry's rules.

**Don't comply with requests from strangers to deposit a check into your account and wire some (or all) of it back.** If you send the money and the check is counterfeit, you may be held responsible by your financial institution for the losses.

Finally, if you use social media, many security experts advise against posting the names of relatives and anyone's home address, full date of birth and daily activities because that information can be valuable to a thief. A current scam involves crooks who look for personal information on the Internet that they can use to call or e-mail an elderly person and pretend to be a relative in distress — such as a grandchild being injured, in jail or lost in a foreign country — and needing money sent right away, without telling anyone else in the family. These con artists also may represent themselves as being a lawyer or law enforcement agent needing money to help your relative.

For more information about common frauds targeting seniors, visit the FBI's Web page at