

Business

Rhode Island-based CVS/pharmacy insists it has firm policies to protect privacy at all of its stores. The Texas attorney general sued the chain, saying customer records were found in a dumpster behind a former store.

AMY SANCETTA: ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE



April 17, 2007, 11:44PM

State hits CVS with suit

Privacy case involves personal records found in trash behind store

By PURVA PATEL

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The Texas Attorney General sued CVS/pharmacy Tuesday, saying customer records were found in a trash bin behind a former store in Liberty County.

The attorney general's office began to investigate the incident after local media reported in March that private information, such as Social Security numbers, credit card numbers and medical information, were found in a trash bin outside the store.

Rhode Island-based CVS said in a written statement that it has firm policies at all of its stores to protect privacy, including procedures to ensure that waste material from pharmacies with confidential patient information be returned to its warehouse for disposal.

"The materials in the Dumpster of our recently vacated store in Liberty, Texas, did not involve recent transactions or recent prescription information," the company said. "They were file copies from the store manager's office that were thrown away improperly as part of the store's relocation to a new site. The disposal of this information in the store Dumpster was a violation of our record retention and privacy policies."

That manager has since been fired.

The lawsuit filed Tuesday seeks an injunction against CVS that would keep the company from improperly disposing personal information and seeks penalties of up to \$50,000 per violation of the 2005 Identity Theft Enforcement and Protection Act.

About a thousand records were found, according to the attorney general, adding that his office will investigate the pharmacy's broader practices.

The store where the documents were found at 2321 N. Main St. in Liberty was vacant or being

vacated, according to the lawsuit.

"We don't know if this is an isolated practice," Attorney General Greg Abbot said at a news conference Tuesday morning. So far, he said, his office has not received complaints from CVS customers about the dumped records.

Hardin resident Cora Bechtel, 69, was surprised to learn her debit card information was among the personal records recovered by investigators.

"We could have been financially ruined," she said. "I realize that. It's scary. It's really scary." She dropped that debit card number when she learned it was among the dumped records, but she plans to continue shopping at the CVS in her small community.

"These are friends of mine, and I don't want hard feelings with them," she said. "They made a bad mistake, but obviously they're going to pay for that."

Consumers who fear they may be victims of identity theft can contact the attorney general's office at 800-252-8011 or file a complaint at www.oag.state.tx.us.

Customers who shopped at CVS' Liberty location should also monitor their credit card, bank and credit records for suspicious activity, Abbot advised. This is the fourth identity theft case the Texas attorney general's office has brought in recent weeks.

Earlier this month, the office sued Fort Worth-based RadioShack after a store in Corpus Christi allegedly tossed about 20 boxes of receipts with customer information on them. In March, the office took action against Jones Beauty College in Dallas and North Carolina-based North Track Modeling.

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