

Department of Justice

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Western District of New York

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BUFFALO MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO IDENTITY THEFT

BUFFALO, N.Y. - U.S. Attorney William J. Hochul, Jr. announced today that Michael Harris, 43, of Buffalo, N.Y., pleaded guilty to aggravated identity theft before Chief U.S. District Judge William M. Skretny. The charge carries a mandatory minimum sentence of two years in prison, a fine of \$250,000 or both.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Russell T. Ippolito, Jr., who is handling the prosecution, stated that between June 28, 2011, and July 25, 2011, the defendant conspired with two others to defraud US Bank by posing as US Bank credit card customers and fraudulently using credit cards in the names of others who resided outside the state of New York. Harris, and one or more of his associates, posing as individuals who had credit cards with US Bank, used the credit cards at various retail stores in the Buffalo area. Store video surveillance evidence was key to securing the plea. The defendant illegally obtained merchandise having an approximate value of \$39,404.75.

One of Harris' co-conspirators, Tynja Cloud, pleaded guilty to knowingly using an unauthorized access device on April 23, 2012. She will be sentenced on July 30, 2012. The prosecution of Harris' second co-conspirator continues.

The plea is the culmination of an investigation by the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, under the direction of Inspector-in-Charge Robert Bethel.

Sentencing is scheduled for August 22, 2012, at 1:00 p.m. before Judge Skretny.

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