

CYBER SECURITY

Newsletter

SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBERS

Problem

In the United States, Social Security Numbers are a person's single most sensitive element of private data. A Social Security Number is a person's unique identifier that can be used by criminals for identity theft, fraud, unauthorized access to medical records, and to create general havoc for a person's overall privacy.

Our organization must sometimes process and store Social Security Numbers. But we -- and you -- have a duty to treat Social Security Numbers with the utmost care. Numerous state and federal laws require special protection for Social Security Numbers.

Solution

For your part, bear in mind the following guidelines regarding Social Security

Numbers:

- Process and store the numbers only in accordance with written policy applicable to your department or work area. If need for a Social Security Number arises where there is no policy, then recommend to your supervisor that a policy be created.
- Be proactively on the lookout for files and records containing Social Security Numbers so they can be secured properly. A common problem is that people mishandle Social Security Numbers, not realizing the numbers are in certain files, have been copied or stored on mobile media, or included in large groups of records.



SSN

Our organization sometimes stores and processes Social Security Numbers. Numerous state and federal laws dictate how we must protect this information. This newsletter covers those key steps.

Idaho State
UNIVERSITY

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Social Security Numbers

A social security number is a nine-digit number issued by the Social Security Administration, an independent agency of the United States government. An example of such a number is listed here:

078-05-1120

The first three digits are the Area Number, based on the zip code of the mailing address of the applicant. The second two digits are known as the Group Number, and the last four are known as the Serial Number. Parents are now required to apply for their children's Social Security Number before the child turns one year old. It is now often done during the application of a birth certificate.

First issued in 1935, the original purpose of SSNs was to track an individual's account within the Social Security program. Since then the numbers have quickly grown to be a simple way to uniquely identify individuals.

- Use only computer systems authorized by our organization to enter, process, or store Social Security Numbers. Do not copy or store the numbers to any unauthorized systems -- including your own private mobile device or personal email account.
- Destroy unnecessary copies of Social Security Numbers using such techniques as secure wiping or shredding.

Although there is no single, all-purpose method for securing Social Security Numbers, here are several practical steps that can promote security:

- Segregate Social Security Numbers from other personally identifiable information such as name or driver's license number. For example, if you need to send information to another party, including a person's name and Social Security Number, you might send the general information by email and then telephone the person and deliver the Social Security Number by direct voice-to-voice communication.

- Encrypt Social Security Numbers when they are stored in digital format or sent electronically over a network;
- Truncate the Social Security Number in records or transmissions so that only the last four or five digits appear.
- Notify your supervisor immediately if you become aware of the loss or compromise of a Social Security Number, or an attempt to trick anyone in our organization into revealing a number or the identity associated with it.

Finally, help us improve and update our policies on Social Security Numbers. We are eager to find responsible ways to collect the numbers less often, to secure them better, and to destroy our records of them more quickly. The people who rely on us will be thankful that you guarded their numbers vigilantly. You would expect others to do no less with your Social Security Number.