



## **Report Summary**

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Social Security Administration  
Office of the Inspector General

### ***The Social Security Administration's Electronic Mail Security Review (Limited Distribution) (A-14-06-16047)***

The objective of our review was to evaluate the adequacy of the Social Security Administration's (SSA) electronic mail (e-mail) services security controls designed to ensure confidentiality, availability, and integrity of sensitive information. As part of the audit, we evaluated SSA's management, operational, and technical controls related to e-mail security for consistency with Federal standards and guidelines and industry best practices.

E-mail is perhaps the most popularly used system for exchanging information over the Internet and is a critical tool used by SSA to complete its mission. Sensitive data is often sent via e-mail within the Agency as well as between SSA and outside entities. In today's network environment, e-mail is also a preferred path by hackers to distribute viruses, worms, spam, and other attacks. The servers that operate the e-mail system are among the most targeted and attacked machines within an organization's network -- second only to web servers. It is critical for any organization to protect information sent or received via e-mail from unauthorized use, disclosure, modification, destruction, or exploitation.

We found that SSA's e-mail security controls reasonably ensure the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of the Agency's e-mail system. While the Agency is working diligently to protect its e-mail system, the following areas need improvement:

- E-mail policies need to be updated to comply with Federal standards;
- Configuration settings for patches need to be installed correctly;
- Information may be viewed through Outlook Web Access on a wireless network by unauthorized individuals;
- E-mail is not tested in the Disaster Recovery Exercise;
- All e-mail risks may not be fully identified in the Agency's Certification and Accreditation program;
- Retention policy needs to be updated in the Information Systems Security Handbook and employees notified; and
- Employees need to be aware of content filtering capabilities.

We made nine recommendations to SSA. The Agency fully agreed with seven of them.

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