



Report Summary

Social Security Administration
Office of the Inspector General

Follow-up: Personally Identifiable Information Made Available to the Public Via the Death Master File (Limited Distribution) (A-06-10-20173)

Our objective was to determine the status of corrective actions taken by the Social Security Administration (SSA) to address recommendations in our June 2008 report, *Personally Identifiable Information Made Available to the General Public Via the Death Master File* (A-06-08-18042).

SSA implemented procedures to report erroneous death entry-related personally identifiable information (PII) breaches to the United States Computer Emergency Readiness Team each week. SSA also hired a contractor to provide ongoing reviews of Death Master File (DMF) exposure related to 26,930 individuals whose PII SSA inadvertently exposed from July 2006 through January 2009. The contractor evaluated available data for anomalous patterns that could identify organized misuse. SSA stated that, to date, the contractor has identified no organized misuse.

However, SSA did not implement a risk-based approach for distributing DMF information, attempt to limit the amount of information included on the DMF version sold to the public, or explore alternatives to inclusion of individuals' full Social Security number (SSN). SSA continued to publish the DMF with the knowledge its contents included the PII of living numberholders. From May 2007 through April 2010, SSA's publication of the DMF resulted in the breach of PII for as many as 36,657 additional living individuals erroneously listed as deceased on the DMF. SSA made these individuals' SSNs; first, middle, and last names; date of birth; and State and ZIP codes of last known residences available to users of the DMF before learning they were not actually deceased. As such, we believe SSA should take additional precautions to limit the number of reporting errors and the amount of personal information published in the DMF—particularly the version sold to the public. We made two recommendations for corrective action. The Agency disagreed with both recommendations.

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