

Report Summary

Social Security Administration Office of the Inspector General

September 2011



Objective

To determine the status of corrective actions the Social Security Administration (SSA) had taken to address recommendations in our September 2006 report, *Survivor Benefits Paid in Instances When the Social Security Administration Removed the Death Entry from a Primary Wage Earner's Record*.

Background

Our September 2006 report identified 307 wage earners whose family members had received survivor benefits even though SSA had removed the wage earners' death entries from the Death Master File, and SSA's Numerical Identification (Numident) file indicated the wage earners were alive.

Our follow-up review focused on how SSA handled the cases we referred during the prior review as well as additional cases identified since May 2007.

To view the full report, visit
<http://www.ssa.gov/oig/ADO/BEPDF/A-06-10-20135.pdf>

Follow-up: Survivor Benefits Paid in Instances When the Social Security Administration Removed the Death Entry from a Primary Wage Earner's Record (A-06-10-20135)

Our Findings

SSA has made progress in completing corrective actions to address the recommendations in our September 2006 report. SSA determined that 286 of the 307 wage earners identified during the prior review were actually deceased. SSA confirmed that 14 wage earners were alive and took action to terminate survivor benefit payments. SSA erroneously issued approximately \$579,000 in survivor benefits to family members of these wage earners. SSA could provide no documentation to indicate completion of death verifications for the remaining seven individuals.

As part of our follow-up review, we identified an additional 642 wage earners whose family members received survivor benefits even though SSA had deleted the wage earners' death entries from the Death Master File, and SSA's Numident file indicated the wage earners were alive. At the time of our review, SSA paid approximately \$644,000 in monthly survivor benefits to family members of the 642 wage earners. Our review of sampled records indicated that, similar to our 2006 findings, SSA employees who deleted these death entries did not document pertinent facts to support or explain these transactions. The resurrection transactions indicated the wage earners were alive, and survivor benefits were improper. If the wage earners were actually deceased, SSA erroneously deleted their information from the Death Master File.

Our Recommendations

We recommended that SSA take additional action on 18 cases from our prior audit and perform death verifications for 642 additional records identified during this review. We also recommended SSA reemphasize to field office employees its transaction documentation policies.

SSA agreed with our recommendations.