

The Social Security Administration's Management of Electronic Message Records

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Office of Audit Report Summary

Objective

To determine whether the Social Security Administration (SSA) had policies, procedures, and controls in place to ensure electronic message records were managed in accordance with Federal regulations.

Background

The *Federal Records Act* defines a record as including all recorded information, regardless of form or characteristics, made or received by a Federal agency under Federal law or in connection with the transaction of public business and preserved, or appropriate for preservation, as evidence of the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities.

Electronic messages include electronic mail and other electronic messaging systems individuals use to communicate. Electronic messages created or received during agency business are Federal records and must be captured and managed in compliance with Federal laws, regulations, and policies.

Findings

We identified several areas where we believe SSA should enhance its policies, procedures, and controls to ensure the proper retention and disposition of all types of electronic message records. Specifically, we found (1) the proper identification, capture, and retention of electronic message records was at risk; (2) SSA needed to appropriately protect email records from loss; (3) SSA had limited oversight of electronic message records; and (4) SSA needed to strengthen its training program related to managing electronic message records.

Recommendations

We recommend SSA:

1. Revise Agency policies and procedures to ensure they reflect Federal law, regulations, and official guidance on the proper identification, capture, retention, and disposition of all types of electronic message records.
2. Clarify Agency policies and procedures related to the acceptable use of personal email accounts to conduct official business.
3. Develop and implement standards for storing and backing up Federal email records to protect them from loss and ensure they may be recovered if deleted.
4. Retain the emails of at least the high-level officials who are most likely to create permanent records.
5. Strengthen the Records Management Coordinators' oversight activities to ensure SSA complies with Federal requirements.
6. Develop comprehensive Agency-wide records management training specific to electronic messages (including email messages and instant messages).

SSA agreed with our recommendations.