



SOCIAL SECURITY

MEMORANDUM

Date: March 25, 2010

Refer To:

To: The Commissioner

From: Inspector General

Subject: Field Office Post-Entitlement Workload Statistics (A-04-10-21047)

The attached final report presents the results of our review. Our objectives were to (1) determine whether the Social Security Administration (SSA) had procedures for routinely examining field office workload data for anomalous trends; and (2) review the reasons for some notable post-entitlement workload increases.

If you wish to discuss the final report, please call me or have your staff contact Steven L. Schaeffer, Assistant Inspector General for Audit, at (410) 965-9700.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Patrick P. O'Carroll, Jr." with a stylized flourish at the end.

Patrick P. O'Carroll, Jr.

Attachment

QUICK RESPONSE EVALUATION

Field Office Post-Entitlement Workload Statistics

A-04-10-21047



March 2010

Mission

By conducting independent and objective audits, evaluations and investigations, we inspire public confidence in the integrity and security of SSA's programs and operations and protect them against fraud, waste and abuse. We provide timely, useful and reliable information and advice to Administration officials, Congress and the public.

Authority

The Inspector General Act created independent audit and investigative units, called the Office of Inspector General (OIG). The mission of the OIG, as spelled out in the Act, is to:

- Conduct and supervise independent and objective audits and investigations relating to agency programs and operations.
- Promote economy, effectiveness, and efficiency within the agency.
- Prevent and detect fraud, waste, and abuse in agency programs and operations.
- Review and make recommendations regarding existing and proposed legislation and regulations relating to agency programs and operations.
- Keep the agency head and the Congress fully and currently informed of problems in agency programs and operations.

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- Authority to publish findings and recommendations based on the reviews.

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OBJECTIVE

Our objectives were to (1) determine whether the Social Security Administration (SSA) had procedures for routinely examining field office workload data for anomalous trends; and (2) review the reasons for some notable post-entitlement¹ workload increases.

BACKGROUND

SSA uses the automated District Office Workload Report (DOWR) system to develop and report comprehensive field office workload production information. The primary purpose of DOWR is to provide weekly and/or monthly counts of measured field office workloads. DOWR captures statistics on approximately 60 workloads. SSA maintains the DOWR statistics on its Intranet website, which is available to both management and staff.

DOWR data used in conjunction with other workload analysis tools enables SSA management to measure staff and other resources expended on field office workloads. DOWR data are an integral part of SSA's Field Office Work Measurement System, which SSA uses to make critical resource decisions, such as estimating future workloads and resource requirements. In general, DOWR data are an important component in SSA's budgeting and staff allocation process.

Field office budgets and staff levels may be impacted by DOWR statistics. A field office that demonstrates a continued significant increase in certain workloads may receive additional resources to help meet the demands of the reported increased workload. As such, it is important that SSA management properly evaluate changes in DOWR statistics.

We analyzed DOWR data for three post-entitlement workloads in which some field offices recorded significant overall increases from Fiscal Years (FY) 2008 to 2009, as follows.

- Category 18: Health Insurance (HI) — This workload includes processing applications for Medicare enrollment, changes in Medicare enrollment, and requests for replacement Medicare cards. This work involves the Title XVIII Medicare program.

¹ Field offices receive and process individual's applications for enrollment into the Title II, XVI, and XVIII programs established under the *Social Security Act*. After SSA determines an individual is entitled to benefits under one or more of the programs, a beneficiary record is established in SSA's system of records. Subsequent actions to update these records are referred to as post-entitlement actions. Field offices process a wide range of post-entitlement actions.

- Category 51: Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Status Changes — This workload includes processing changes in a beneficiary's contact information, such as telephone number(s) and address(es). This workload also includes posting other beneficiary information such as income, resources, and changes in banking information. This work relates to the Title XVI SSI program.
- Category 60: Retirement, Survivors, Disability, and Health Insurance (RSDHI) Status Changes — Like Category 51, this workload includes processing changes in a beneficiary's contact information, such as telephone number(s) and address(es). However, this work involves the Title II RSDHI program.

For these three DOWR categories, we determined that about 2 percent of SSA's field offices had an increase of 34 percent or more in the number of workload units processed in FYs 2008 and 2009. In fact, several field offices had increases of over 300 percent in one or more of these workload categories. We selected six offices that had an increase of 60 percent or more in at least one of the workload categories examined. These six offices were located in three SSA Regions—Dallas, New York, and San Francisco. Further detail regarding our scope and methodology may be found in Appendix B.

Results of Review

SSA management analyzed DOWR data at a national and regional level; however, this analysis did not always focus on, or identify, anomalous trends at specific field offices. Our interviews with regional officials and field office managers determined that some high-priority workloads may have been routinely monitored. However, for lower-priority tasks, such as those we examined, less emphasis was placed on examining the rationale for unusual trends—unless a specific allegation or problem was brought to management’s attention. For the six selected field offices reviewed, management at the respective Regional Offices (Dallas, New York, and San Francisco) stated they had not identified the significant changes in the three workloads we tested. However, one regional office agreed that periodic review of existing DOWR data to detect trends and aberrations in workloads would help ensure the integrity of its workload processes.

SSA regional officials generally provided reasonable explanations for the significant increases in the three workloads examined. For example, at two offices, in FY 2009, field office staff began routinely asking eligible visitors whether they wanted a Medicare replacement card. Given the opportunity to obtain a new card, many customers responded positively, and the work was processed. Regional management for these offices explained that this practice was not consistent with typical field office procedures. Since our discussions with the respective regional officials, this practice has been discontinued. At other field offices, regional officials explained that field office managers emphasized an improved customer service practice in which staff identified all services and record updates that could be performed for a customer during a single office visit. This practice was known as “full case processing.” Although these practices caused significant increases in the three workloads reviewed, we believe the field offices’ intention was to provide more efficient customer service. In fact, these increases resulted in no additional resources for the field offices reviewed.

Management’s Use of DOWR Statistics

A representative from SSA’s Office of Public Service and Operations Support and regional office management stated that changes in DOWR statistics were primarily analyzed on a national and regional level. Generally, SSA did not evaluate DOWR changes for specific field offices unless circumstances caused them to do so. National DOWR data for the three workloads we reviewed indicated minor percentage changes from FY 2008 to FY 2009. Specifically, the SSI and RSDHI Status Changes workloads increased 7 and 4 percent, respectively, while the HI workload decreased 4 percent. However, nationally, SSA management indicated the changes did not cause concern or further review. Table 1 details the changes in the three workloads from FY 2008 to FY 2009.

Table 1: National DOWR Data - HI, SSI, and RSDHI Status Changes

Workload Category	FY 2008 Number of Work Units	FY 2009 Number of Work Units	Unit Change FY 2008 to FY 2009	Change FY 2008 to FY 2009
18 – HI	802,702	769,724	-32,978	-4%
51 – SSI Status Changes	10,779,229	11,583,075	803,846	7%
60 – RSDHI Status Changes	9,799,796	10,180,009	380,213	4%

Of the six field offices we reviewed, three had an increase in the HI workload of about 155 percent or more. However, the regional offices were not aware of the increases until we brought the information to their attention. Officials from all three regional offices explained that DOWR data were not routinely analyzed to identify anomalies in these three workload categories. Nonetheless, one of the regional offices agreed that such analysis could provide useful management information.

Table 2 details the changes in DOWR data from FY 2008 to FY 2009 for the six offices reviewed.

Table 2: FY 2009 Increase in DOWR Data – Six Selected Offices’ Workloads: HI, SSI Status Changes, and RSDHI Status Changes

Field Office Name	HI		SSI Status Changes		RSDHI Status Changes	
	Workload Unit Increase	Workload Percent Increase	Workload Unit Increase	Workload Percent Increase	Workload Unit Increase	Workload Percent Increase
Fremont, CA	3,292	363	2,195	22	12,537	166
Delano, CA	3,052	305	142	1.5	4,221	77
North Sacramento, CA	3,445	194	6,533	21	948	8
New Iberia, LA	1,330	216	2,139	36	807	10
Brooklyn Avenue X, NY	3,383	155	1,069	11	3,906	41
San Jose, CA	191	16	5,823	60	3,220	40

Causes for the Significant Increase in FY 2009 DOWR Categories Reviewed

Each of the three regional offices performed a review to determine the cause for the significant increase in workloads at the six field offices selected.

The San Francisco Regional Office (SFRO) attributed the significant DOWR increases to changes in field office management. Specifically, the new managers emphasized to their staff a customer service practice that focused on handling all of a claimant’s needs during a single visit. Management referred to this practice as “full case processing.” For example, a customer who visits an office to inquire about a change in a benefit amount would be asked if their personal contact information (telephone number and address) had changed, whether a replacement Medicare card was needed (when applicable), or whether any other services were required. The SFRO also stated that

successful efforts to reduce certain backlogged post-entitlement workloads added to the increase in the FY 2009 workloads we identified. During its review, the SFRO found no evidence of unethical work practices or management coercion to inflate the number of work units processed.

We interviewed field office managers and staff at the Fremont and Delano field offices. Management and staff responses were consistent with the SFRO's conclusions. The Fremont office manager also stated that the significant increase in the HI workload was probably due to some staff being too systematic in asking visitors whether they wanted a Medicare replacement card.

The New York Regional Office (NYRO) found that staff working the reception windows at the Brooklyn Avenue X field office asked all eligible visitors whether they needed a new Medicare card. When asked, many visitors responded that they would like a new card. Accordingly, staff processed the requests, which resulted in a significant increase in the FY 2009 HI workload units. The NYRO further stated that this was not a regional practice, and field office staff had been instructed to only process a replacement Medicare card application at the customer's request. Finally, the NYRO stated that the increase in the HI workload would not have led to additional staff for the field office.

The Dallas Regional Office (DRO) found a cause similar to that identified by the NYRO. The DRO attributed the increase to a small number of employees who began routinely asking visitors if they would like a replacement Medicare card. Many of the customers responded that they would like a replacement card, and staff processed the requests accordingly. The DRO advised field office management to instruct staff to discontinue this practice.

Workload Increases Did Not Result in Additional Field Office Staff

Management at SFRO, NYRO, and DRO stated that the increases in these workloads would have had little impact on their decisions to provide the offices additional staff. Regional management further explained that DOWR statistics are only one of many factors considered when making field office staffing decisions. Other, more critical, factors evaluated in staffing decisions include

- changes in a field office's service area,
- specific needs of a field office's service area,
- significant changes in the number of visitors at a particular field office,
- existence of special or backlogged workloads, and
- expected changes in staff due to retirement and transfers.

The Associate Commissioner for Public Service and Operations Support emphasized that the causes for the DOWR anomalies were isolated events. Further, SSA's review found that, although the increases in these workloads were significant, they were not at a level that would impact data used in regional and field office staffing decisions. Finally, the Associate Commissioner stated that his office does not encourage regional management to take unnecessary actions to increase workload credits.

From the end of FY 2008 to the end of FY 2009, the number of on-duty employees increased at two of the six offices we reviewed. The number of employees at the New Iberia office increased by one, while the Delano field office increased by two. The number of employees at the other four offices did not change. Table 3 details the number of employees at each of the six field offices.

Table 3: On-Duty Employees at the End of FYs 2008 and 2009

Office Name	Number of Employees as of 9/30/2008	Number of Employees as of 9/30/2009	Change in Number of Employees
Fremont, CA	26	26	0
North Sacramento, CA	43	43	0
San Jose, CA	30	30	0
Brooklyn Avenue X, NY	43	43	0
New Iberia, LA	14	15	+1
Delano, CA	11	13	+2

SSA management explained that the staff increases at the two offices resulted from factors unrelated to the increases in the three DOWR workloads reviewed. Specifically, staff was added at the New Iberia field office primarily to help with the increase in customer visits. The DRO stated that the New Iberia office had a 7.1-percent increase in visitors from FY 2008 to FY 2009. At the Delano field office, the SFRO explained that one staff increase resulted when a claims representative position vacated in FY 2008 was filled in FY 2009, and one other staff was added in FY 2009 based on the office needs.

Matters for Consideration

DOWR statistics provide management with a useful tool for monitoring field office workloads. Workload statistics can assist management in identifying significant changes in workloads and help with deciding where staff and resources could be best allocated. We understand that DOWR statistics are only one of many factors considered when making field office staffing decisions. Other important factors evaluated in staffing decisions include changes in or specific needs of a field office's service area, number of visitors, and special or backlogged workloads.

Although all three regional offices explained that the significant workload changes we identified did not impact their field office staffing decisions, their investigations of workload anomalies found some cause for minor corrective actions. The DRO and NYRO responded that their investigations found several field office staff were not processing the HI workload in accordance with regional practices. Both Regions considered the problems to be minor but took corrective actions. The SFRO primarily attributed the workload increases to management's emphasis on "full case processing," a work efficiency practice that attempts to identify and complete as many services a visitor may need during one visit. Full case processing aside, the manager at the office with the highest increase in the HI workload was concerned that this workload was not being worked as intended. He investigated the matter and took some minor corrective actions that should reduce this workload count.

To ensure SSA management identifies significant changes in all workload statistics, which may indicate potential problems in workloads or a need for employee training, we believe SSA should consider requiring that regional offices develop workload trend statistics for all DOWR categories for each of their respective field offices. From these data, SSA should identify and investigate significant workload anomalies. In response to our draft report, SSA agreed that regional offices should develop DOWR trend statistics for each of their respective field offices and stated it will work to implement this practice.

Appendices

APPENDIX A – Acronyms

APPENDIX B – Scope and Methodology

APPENDIX C - OIG Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments

Acronyms

DOWR	District Office Workload Report
DRO	Dallas Regional Office
FY	Fiscal Year
HI	Health Insurance
NYRO	New York Regional Office
OIG	Office of the Inspector General
RSDHI	Retirement, Survivor, Disability, and Health Insurance
SFRO	San Francisco Regional Office
SSA	Social Security Administration
SSI	Supplemental Security Income

Scope and Methodology

To accomplish our objective, we:

- Obtained and analyzed District Office Workload Report (DOWR) data for Fiscal Years 2008 through 2009 for three workload categories.
 - Category 18 – Health Insurance
 - Category 51 – Supplemental Security Income Status Changes
 - Category 60 – Retirement, Survivors, Disability, and Health Insurance Status Changes
- We reviewed applicable sections of Social Security Administration’s *Management Information Manual - II*.
- We selected six offices that had an increase of 60 percent or more in at least one of the workload categories examined. For these offices, we performed detailed analysis of all DOWR workload categories. The six offices were located in three of SSA’s Regions – Dallas, New York, and San Francisco. The six field offices were:
 - New Iberia, Louisiana – Dallas Region
 - Brooklyn Avenue X, New York – New York Region
 - Delano, California – San Francisco Region
 - Fremont, California – San Francisco Region
 - North Sacramento, California – San Francisco Region
 - San Jose, California – San Francisco Region
- We interviewed officials from the Office of Public Service and Operations Support, Dallas Regional Office, New York Regional Office, and San Francisco Regional Office, all under the Deputy Commissioner for Operations.
- We obtained and reviewed the results of the regional offices’ investigations into workload increases at the six selected offices.
- We visited and interviewed field office managers and staff (service representatives, and claims representatives) at the Fremont and San Jose field offices.

We performed our review from October 2009 through January 2010 in Fremont and San Jose, California, and Atlanta, Georgia. The component reviewed was the Office of the Deputy Commissioner for Operations. Our review of internal controls was limited to SSA's process for monitoring and addressing DOWR trends and anomalies. We conducted our review in accordance with the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency's Quality Standards for Inspections.¹

¹ In January 2009, the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency was superseded by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency. *The Inspector General Reform Act of 2008*, Pub. L. No. 110-409 § 7, 5 U.S.C. App. 3 § 11.

OIG Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments

OIG Contacts

Kimberly Byrd, Director, Atlanta Audit Division

Frank Nagy, Audit Manager, Atlanta Office of Audit

Acknowledgments

In addition to those named above:

Luis A. Ramírez, Senior Auditor

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