

# Report Summary

Social Security Administration Office of the Inspector General

February 2009



## Objective

To identify the sources of erroneous death reports input into the Death Master File (DMF) and determine whether requiring that all States submit death reports via the Electronic Death Registration (EDR) reporting system will eliminate death reporting errors.

## Background

In June 2008, we reported that SSA's publication of the DMF resulted in the breach of personally identifiable information (PII) for over 20,000 living individuals erroneously listed as deceased in the DMF. SSA made these individuals' SSNs; first, middle, and last names; dates of birth and death; and State and ZIP codes of last known residences available to users of the DMF before learning they were not actually deceased. Review of available DMF data indicated that from April 2007 through October 2008, SSA added and then subsequently deleted 7,597 death entries to/from the DMF.

To view the full report, visit <http://www.ssa.gov/oig/ADO/BEPDF/A-06-09-29095.pdf>

## ***Quick Response Evaluation: Sources of Erroneous Death Entries Input into the Death Master File (A-06-09-29095)***

### **Matters for Consideration**

Most of the erroneous death entries input in the DMF originated from non-State sources. Therefore, even if all States submitted death reports via the EDR, death reporting errors would likely continue.

Even with full implementation of EDR, additional changes would be necessary to eliminate the cause of most erroneous death entries. First, SSA would have to stop accepting and inputting death reports from all non-EDR sources. For example, SSA would have to turn away widows or other family members who visit a field office to report a death until it receives "official" notification from the State before initiating or terminating related benefit claims. SSA would also have to stop processing death reports received directly from other non-State sources, such as funeral homes, postal authorities, etc. SSA acknowledged that it would not be practical for field offices to stop accepting and processing first party death reports. This would delay the processing of claims, increase erroneous payments, and cause public relations problems. Therefore, it is imperative that SSA continue to improve the death reporting process to reduce or eliminate erroneous death terminations and prevent the accidental exposure of living individuals' PII.