

Numident Death Information Not Included on the Death Master File

A-06-16-50069



September 2016

Office of Audit Report Summary

Objective

To determine whether the Social Security Administration (SSA) should continue excluding Numident records that contain numberholders' dates of death from the Death Master File (DMF).

Background

The Numident is a numerically ordered master file of all assigned Social Security numbers (SSN).

SSA uses death information from the Numident to compile a record of reported deaths known as the DMF. SSA provides the DMF to Federal benefit-paying agencies for use in preventing payments to deceased individuals. SSA also provides a version of the DMF to the Department of Commerce, which, in turn, sells that data to public and private customers.

Prior Office of the Inspector General reports have identified millions of deceased numberholders *who had no* death information on the Numident. As a result, these numberholders' information did not appear on the DMF. For this review, we matched Numident records that listed the numberholders' dates of death against the DMF and identified numberholders *who had* death information on the Numident whose information did not appear on the DMF.

Findings

SSA excluded from the DMF personally identifiable information for approximately 8.7 million numberholders whose Numident records included the individuals' dates of death. SSA records contained various types of information further indicating that these numberholders were deceased. As a result, we believe SSA should revisit its decision to exclude these records from the DMF.

- The vast majority of numberholders, if alive, would be age 65 or older; yet almost none had reported earnings in the past 25 years or was receiving SSA payments at the time of our review.
- Nearly all 8.7 million Numident records contained entry code "D," indicating the numberholders were already deceased when SSA input their information onto the electronic Numident file.
- Approximately 5.3 million numberholders also had dates of death on SSA's Master Earnings File and/or payment records.

We also determined that thousands of these SSNs may have been misused. Specifically, for Tax Years 2009 through 2014, SSA received reports that individuals using 69,863 SSNs had approximately \$3.9 billion in wages, tips, or self-employment income. SSA transferred the earnings to the Earnings Suspense File primarily because the employees' or self-employed individuals' name/SSN combination on the earnings reports did not match SSA records.

Resolving these discrepancies will improve the accuracy and completeness of the DMF and help prevent future SSN misuse.

Recommendation

We recommend SSA develop a methodology to incorporate these numberholders' information into the DMF. SSA agreed with our recommendation.