

Your online resource for everything Army

ArmyTimes

Community

<http://www.armytimes.com/community/opinion/military-editorial-troops-social-security-numbers-should-be-protected-010311w/>

Troops' Social Security numbers should be protected

Local, state and federal agencies have for years been weaning themselves off the use of Social Security numbers because the numbers have proved instrumental to the growing scourge of identity theft.

Once stolen, SSNs enable thieves to run up debt and destroy the credit of the rightful owners. Victims find themselves enduring months and years of stress trying to correct the record and restore their good financial standing.

That's tough enough for the average citizen, and all but unbearable for deployed troops and their families.

Yet the U.S. military lags all other segments of the government and society in taking steps to minimize exposure of personally identifiable information such as SSNs.

In an article in Small Wars Journal, three West Point professors call out the Defense Department for needlessly putting troops' personal information at risk by requiring them to provide Social Security numbers for seemingly every activity and piece of paper.

To be fair, the Pentagon has for years been working on protecting troops' personal information. And starting in May, the new Defense Department identification cards will no longer feature Social Security numbers.

But more needs to be done, and faster.

The authors are right to suggest the Pentagon act promptly to replace the Social Security number with a military ID number. After all, that was what troops used before the Defense Department adopted use of the SSN, beginning in 1969.

This is a move that should be pushed at top Pentagon levels, with a clear directive down the chain of command to respect and protect troops' personal information.

Military Times Network

The websites of the Military Times Network provide members of the U.S. Military and their families with independent, award-winning journalism that impacts their lives.

All content © 2011, Gannett Government Media Corporation