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## Census Scams -- You Can Count on It

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**Background.** The U.S. Census has been conducted every 10 years since 1790, and is required by the Constitution. The Census was intended to be used primarily for the apportionment of Representatives for Congress. However, the complexity of the Census has grown. The U.S. government has found extensive uses for Census-related statistics. The Census has also been crucial in tracking the population needs of various regions and understanding the composition of the nation's population.

As the 2010 Census gets underway, some people continue to raise privacy objections. For 2010, the Census Bureau will no longer use a long form. In previous Censuses, some households received a long form asking for detailed social and economic information. Fortunately, the 2010 Census will use only a short form asking basic questions, such as name, gender, age, date of birth, race, and ethnicity.

More detailed socioeconomic information collected during past Censuses will continue to be collected through the American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS gathers and compiles data about communities in the United States on a yearly basis rather than once every 10 years. A small percentage of the population on a rotating basis receives the ACS each year.

Title 13 of the US Code regulates the structure of the Census and its uses by the government and private entities. Under federal law, individuals can be fined for not completing Census questionnaires. Section 221 requires a fine when an individual does not fill out the form, as well as a fine for providing false information. Federal courts have concluded that this law is Constitutional. However, the PRC is not aware of individuals having actually been fined.

Along with the many benefits of the Census come some privacy risks. While Privacy Rights Clearinghouse does not focus on Census issues as one of its core missions, we encourage you to visit the website of the Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC). EPIC has extensive resources about the Census posted at <http://epic.org/privacy/census/> <sup>[1]</sup>.

**Census Scams.** There have been reports of scammers attempting to defraud the public by posing as Census workers. The Census potentially presents an opportunity for con artists to collect personal information about you to commit fraud. Typically, scammers will seek to obtain information such as your Social Security number or financial information. Don't fall for the trap! Keep the following tips in mind to make sure that you don't fall prey to a scammer:

- The Census will not contact you by email. Do not respond to any email claiming to be from the Census.
- You cannot complete the Census online. Never enter your personal Census information on any website.

- The Census will not ask for your Social Security number. Do not give it out to a Census worker or when answering the Census questionnaire.
- The Census will not ask for your banking, credit card or financial information. Do not give it out to a Census worker or when answering the Census questionnaire.
- If a Census worker knocks on your door, they will have a badge, a handheld device, and Census Bureau canvas bag. Ask to see their badge before answering any questions. They will also have a second picture ID
- Census workers will not ask to enter your home. Do not allow a Census worker into your home.
- Census workers will not ask you for money. Never give any money to a Census worker.
- If you receive a call from someone claiming to be from the Census, you can verify that the person calling you is a Census Bureau employee by calling 866-226-2864. Remember that callers can “spoof” their number to make it look like the call is coming from the Census, when it really is not.
- A sample of the official 10 question Census form is available at [http://2010.census.gov/2010census/pdf/2010\\_Questionnaire\\_Info.pdf](http://2010.census.gov/2010census/pdf/2010_Questionnaire_Info.pdf) [2]. Do not complete the Census form that you receive unless it looks exactly like the form shown. It probably is a scam.
- If you think that you may be the victim of a scam, contact your Census regional office through <http://www.census.gov/regions/>. [3]
- Additional contact information for the Census Processing Center is at <http://www.census.gov/npc/contactus.html> [4].

At Census time and throughout the year, guard your personal information carefully. If you are not certain of the legitimacy of a request for information from the Census or any other organization, ask questions. Do not provide any personal information until you have verified the identity of the requester.

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**Links:**

[1] <http://epic.org/privacy/census/>

[2] [http://2010.census.gov/2010census/pdf/2010\\_Questionnaire\\_Info.pdf](http://2010.census.gov/2010census/pdf/2010_Questionnaire_Info.pdf)

[3] <http://www.census.gov/regions/>.

[4] <http://www.census.gov/npc/contactus.html>