

BBB Alerts Consumers about U.S. Census Workers: Be Cooperative, But Cautious!

For years, Better Business Bureau has educated consumers about not giving out personal information over the telephone or to anyone who shows up at their front door. With the U.S. Census process beginning, BBB advises people to be cooperative, but cautious, so as not to become a victim of fraud or identity theft.

The first phase of the 2010 U.S. Census is under way as workers have begun verifying the addresses of households across the country. Eventually, more than 140,000 U.S. Census workers will count every person in the United States and will gather information about every person living at each address including name, age, gender, race and other relevant data.

“Most people are rightfully cautious and won’t give out personal information to unsolicited phone callers or visitors, however the Census is an exception to the rule,” said Steve Cox, BBB spokesperson. “Unfortunately, scammers know that the public is more willing to share personal data when taking part in the Census and they have an opportunity to ply their trade by posing as a government employee and soliciting sensitive financial information.”

The Census data will be used to allocate more than \$300 billion in federal funds every year, as well as determine a State’s number of Congressional representatives. Households are actually required by law to respond to the Census Bureau’s request for information.

During the U.S. Census, households will be contacted by mail, telephone or visited by a U.S. Census worker who will inquire about the number of people living in the house. Unfortunately, people may also be contacted by scammers, who impersonate Census workers to get access to banking and financial information. Law enforcement in several states have issued warnings that scammers are already posing as Census Bureau employees and knocking on doors asking for donations and Social Security numbers.

The big question is - how do you tell the difference between a U.S. Census worker and a con artist? BBB offers the following advice:

- If a U.S. Census worker knocks on your door, they will have a badge, a handheld device, a Census Bureau canvas bag and a confidentiality notice. Ask to see their identification and their badge before answering their questions. However, you should never invite anyone you don’t know into your home.
- Census workers are currently only knocking on doors to verify address information. Do not give your Social Security number, credit card or banking information to anyone, even if they claim they need it for the U.S. Census. While the Census Bureau might ask for basic financial information, such as a salary range, it will not ask for Social Security, bank account or credit card numbers nor will employees solicit donations.
- Eventually, Census workers may contact you by telephone, mail or in person at home. However, they will not contact you by e-mail, so be on the look out for e-mail scams impersonating the Census. Never click on a link or open any attachments in an e-mail that are supposedly from the U.S. Census Bureau.

For more advice on avoiding identity theft and fraud, visit www.bbb.org