

***By Tom Browning***

***Security Officer***

The official U.S. Census, which is conducted every 10 years and is described in Article I, Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution, calls for an accurate count of people living in the United States and is used as a gauge in the allotment of each state's seats in the House of Representatives and in the allocation of funds to citizens in need.

The first official census was conducted in 1790 under Thomas Jefferson, who was the Secretary of State. That census, taken by U.S. marshals on horseback, counted 3.9 million inhabitants. Since that time, the census has been conducted every 10 years.

While participation is safe, a certain level of caution is necessary when divulging personal information. Citizens need to clearly differentiate legitimate U.S. census employee communications from fraudulent activity.

It's important for people to be on guard against predatory individuals and organizations who piggyback on official US Census activities with their own copy-cat schemes to solicit private information.

As the Chief Security Officer of America's leading physical security services company, I believe it is vital to ensure that the American public understands the importance of participating in the U.S. Census while not becoming victimized by con-artists.

The Census Bureau seeks to determine household information pertaining only to the occupants' age, address, phone number, gender, race, birth-date and marital status and whether you own or rent your home.

You can view the questions at: <http://2010.census.gov/2010census/how/interactive-form.php>, although no census information will be taken via the Internet.

Information requested beyond the information on this form is likely being perpetrated by scam artists.

The Census Bureau employs thousands of trained federal employees to conduct surveys in person, over the phone or via the U.S. mail.

Requests for census information will be labeled from the U.S. Census Bureau as “Official Business of the United States.” A notice from the Census Bureau will be mailed prior to receiving forms, phone calls or visits from census workers.

Americans will be asked to complete and mail back the 10-question census form when it arrives in mailboxes around March 15-17 2010.

The following tips will help you recognize fraudulent activity or unofficial data collections to keep predators at bay while ensuring your valid participation in the important census process:

- **Don't Get Social**—The U.S. Census does not request your social security number so do not divulge this information to anyone claiming to be a U.S. Census representative.
- **Avoid Phishing Trips**—The U.S. Census is not conducting any surveying via the Internet so any emails or other electronic communications received are fraudulent “phishing trips” that should be immediately reported as spam and deleted.

“Phishing” is the unlawful practice of attempting to acquire private information such as usernames, passwords, social security numbers, bank account and credit card details by masquerading as a trustworthy person or organization in an email or via instant messaging.

Often the “phishers” direct you to enter this private information at a fake web site that looks almost uniform to the legitimate one.

- Don't Pay Cents (or Dollars) for Census—The Census Bureau never asks for money or a donation.

Steer clear of anyone purporting to be with the Census Bureau that asks for monetary donations. Similarly, the Census Bureau will not request passwords or access to bank accounts, credit cards and other financial information.

- Be an ID Watchdog— If a census worker visits your home, ask for identification. It is the duty of every U.S Census employee to provide their identification to every person that is being visited.

All census workers carry official government badges marked with their name. A Census taker will never ask to enter your home.

The representative can provide you with supervisor contact information. You can also call the regional office phone number for verification or the Census Bureau call center at 1.800.923.8282.

Civility is Central to Census –U.S. Census employees are educated to be civil with every citizen or non-resident that they contact.

If you come across an official who is acting in an intimidating or aggressive manner, you have the right to refuse to divulge information and to report this person to the authorities.

Census workers are bound by law to keep your information confidential and are not permitted

to share it with anyone. If you prefer not to share your information in person, complete and return the form you receive by mail from the U.S. Census Bureau.

For more information, visit the United States Census at [www.2010census.gov](http://www.2010census.gov) and the Better Business Bureau at [www.bbb.org](http://www.bbb.org)

About the author: Tom Browning is Chief Security Officer and Vice President of Compliance at AlliedBarton Security Services, [www.alliedbarton.com](http://www.alliedbarton.com), the industry's premier provider of highly trained security personnel to many industries including commercial real estate, higher education, healthcare, residential communities, chemical/petrochemical, government, manufacturing and distribution, financial institutions, and shopping centers.