

# Your Personal Information is Safe With the U.S. Census Bureau



As soon as you hear that census enumerator's knock at your door, a horrible thought may cross your mind.

"Can the whole world see my answers?"

You can put that fear to rest right now. Federal law (Title 13, United States Code) mandates that no one outside the U.S. Census Bureau can ever be given any information that would enable them to connect your answers with your name and address before anyone inside the Census Bureau sees your completed questionnaire, they must first be sworn to secrecy. And if they were to violate this oath? They would have the long arm of the law to contend with: a sizable fine up to \$250,000 and a prison term up to 5 years.

How strict is the Census Bureau about adhering to this law? Not even the President of the United States is permitted to look at individual census records!

Not that Presidents haven't tried over the years. Before major renovations that would temporarily close down the White House got under way roughly a half century ago, Secret Service agents visited the Census Bureau. Their mission was to try to find information about neighbors around the house where they were planning to move President Harry S. Truman until work was completed on the White House.

The agents explained to Ed Goldfield, program coordinator for the 1950 census, that obtaining this information was a matter of national security. But Goldfield denied their request, explaining that releasing information on individuals obtained from the census was against the law. Today, protecting the privacy of census respondents remains a critical part of every Census Bureau employee's training.

Of course, if the President isn't allowed to see your answers, neither is anyone else outside the Census Bureau. This means courts of law, credit company solicitors, the police and military, the Internal Revenue Service, the

Federal Bureau of Investigation, immigration and welfare agencies—nobody! But what about the Freedom of Information Act? Well, it might give individual access to lots of information, but not to individual census answers.

The Census Bureau's dedication to confidentiality plays an important role in everything it does. Census workers must pass security and employment reference checks. They cannot currently work as tax collectors, assessors, or law enforcement officials. Protecting the privacy of people who reply to the census is an important part of every census take's training.

The Census Bureau protects your information with numerous security measures, including electronic barriers, scrambling devices, and dedicated lines. Once your questionnaire has been scanned at our National Processing Center in Indiana, your paper form is shredded. Your answers are combined with others to produce the statistical summaries that are published. No one can ever connect your answers with your name or address.

The Census Bureau's policy on confidentiality dates back 150 years. Since it was established, the agency has processed hundreds of millions of questionnaires—from those filled out by movie stars to those completed by your neighbors—without any breach of trust.

There are three certainties in life—death, taxes, and the continuation of the Census Bureau's proud tradition of keeping information it collects about individuals strictly private.

To find out more about the Special Census program, visit the Census Bureau's Web site located at the following address:

[www.census.gov/regions/specialcensus/](http://www.census.gov/regions/specialcensus/)

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