

## Social Security Number Issues, Briefing Paper #2

<b>Public Display</b>	
<b>Truncation</b>	<p>Often, all but last 4 digits are truncated.</p> <p>The first 3 digits are state-based. If a person's birth place is known (social security numbers now are required for children at age 1 – so most people get them at birth) or if the person's location is known for when they obtained the social security number, the first 3 digits are not hard to figure out. Wyoming has only 1 set of 3 digits. Montana has 2. The second 2 digits are also not hard to calculate. Pat Boles of the Department of Administration's Office of Cyber Protection estimates the numbers may require only 100 or so tries to figure out the right combination.</p> <p>Montana election registration allows the last 4 numbers of a social security number (or a driver's license). These may not be publicly displayed.</p>
<b>Public Records</b>	<p>Do all records that are public have to be public in the same media?</p> <p>Most court records are public (except for certain juvenile records) but the access to them has been limited by people having to go to a courthouse and request them individually. As more records are put online, the access opens. So can the opportunity for ID theft if social security numbers and other combinations of personal identifying information are in the public paper documents that have been scanned into an electronic form and posted on the Internet.</p>
<b>Use of social security numbers</b>	
<b>Unique identifier</b>	<p>Theft of social security numbers indicates that they might not be as unique as intended – acknowledging that they were intended for use with Social Security then for taxes and not necessarily for the credit reporting system that has developed and uses social security numbers extensively.</p> <p>Linda Foley of the Identity Theft Resource Center in San Diego says if a person suspects that more than one person is using their social security number, they can contact the IRS Tax Advocates to help track this down. Asking directly about this to the Social Security Administration apparently runs afoul of privacy issues. A check of Montana's criminal records system indicated that about 1/10 of 1% of social security numbers were used by more than one person, but the Department of Justice says there is no way to tell if these numbers were wrongly used or if there was a clerical error on some. The opposite also was true – that one person had more than one social security number, possibly with the same mix of reasons – intention or clerical errors.</p>

(Prepared by Pat Murdo, Legislative Services, 5/12/06)