



Fraud Advisory

Social Security Administration
Office of the Inspector General

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www.socialsecurity.gov/oig

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Social Security Inspector General Warns Public about Misleading Internet Websites that Appear to be Official Social Security Administration Site

Recently OIG has received complaints from Social Security applicants who believed that personal information they provided to the Social Security Administration had somehow been disclosed, without their permission, to claimant representative firms.

An Office of the Inspector General investigation revealed that instead, while the applicants believed they were visiting the Social Security Administration's official website, they were instead visiting privately-owned websites designed so as to *appear* to be that of the Social Security Administration. As a result, some applicants provided personal information when the website operators later contacted them to offer representation.

Some of the misleading characteristics of these websites include: official-sounding website addresses; links which users could click on to (purportedly) apply for benefits; and the use of patriotic and/or governmental symbols, such as the American flag.

The Social Security Administration and the Office of the Inspector General are concerned that some applicants who mistakenly visited these websites believed they were applying for benefits online with SSA. The Office of the Inspector General has taken action under Section 1140 of the Social Security Act to stop the owners of these and similar websites from misleading the public in this fashion.

“Any organization that uses misleading tactics such as these to victimize applicants for Social Security benefits will be dealt with swiftly, and to the full extent of the law,” said Patrick P. O’Carroll, Jr., Inspector General for the Social Security Administration.

To date, the operators of two websites have been contacted and agreed to alter their sites to eliminate confusion. Nevertheless, Social Security Commissioner Michael J. Astrue urges the public to exercise caution online, and to provide personal information only through the Social Security Administration's official website, www.socialsecurity.gov.

Anyone with knowledge of misleading websites such as those described in this advisory or any suspicious activity involving Social Security programs should contact the Office of the Inspector

General's Fraud Hotline at <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/oig/hotline/> or by phone at 1-800-269-0271. (Those who are deaf or hard-of-hearing can call the OIG TTY number at 1-866-501-2101.)

If a person has questions about Social Security benefits or programs, he or she should contact Social Security's toll-free customer service number at **1-800-772-1213** or visit Social Security's official website at www.socialsecurity.gov. (Those who are deaf or hard-of-hearing can call Social Security's TTY number at 1-800-325-0778.)