
Randomized Assignment of Social Security Numbers

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[Quality Control Systems Corporation](#)

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(Randomized Assignment to the U.S. Army, July 20, 1917)

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The randomized assignment of Social Security Numbers (SSNs) by the Social Security Administration (SSA) beginning in June, 2011 introduces some important changes in the decades-long practice of SSN validation by many businesses and organizations. Fortunately, a simple counter-measure based on the usage history of a claimed SSN can minimize the negative impact that the new policy could have on established fraud detection and data quality control programs.

There were approximately 460 million SSNs in the pool of nine-digit numbers that had already been issued by the beginning of 2011. The new assignment procedure concerns only SSNs issued on or after June 25, 2011. Persons who already have a SSN will not be assigned a new number. SSNs assigned under the older system are easily identifiable by a [reliable database with detailed historical issuance information](#). These SSNs will not be affected by the new policy. The key to a continuing, strong program of SSN validation is the ability to discriminate between SSNs that were potentially randomly assigned and numbers that may belong to the older, non-randomized group based on the actual usage or the claimed dates of issuance of the SSNs.

New SSNs were assigned at an average rate of about 5.6 million per year over the period 1999 through 2008. Persons with newly issued SSNs are largely infants, new immigrants to the United States, as well as foreign students and temporary workers with work permits. During the years that new immigrants have been covered by the "enumeration at entry" program, these persons accounted for less than 100,000 new SSNs annually. The great majority of randomized SSNs will be

assigned through the “enumeration at birth” program. It will be many years until members of this group are reasonably suspected as perpetrators of identity fraud or identity theft.

Although the impact of randomization will be slight in the short term, we recommend that organizations relying on SSN validation record the date(s) on which claimed SSNs are used or are claimed to have been issued. This is because SSNs that are used or claimed to have been issued before June 25, 2011 cannot be members of the relatively smaller set of SSNs that SSA issued only on or after that date. In some datasets, this will necessitate collecting new information from claimants or linking information from datasets with information about the date the number was used. SSNs that are claimed to have been issued or were used before June 25, 2011 are always problematic if they fail validation against a database of issuance information that extends to the beginning of the system in 1936, such as [SecureID™](#).

Like the older pool of SSNs, the validity of SSNs potentially issued from the “randomized” pool that are claimed or used on and after June 25, 2011 should be consistent with biographical data, including year of birth as well as citizenship and residence history. For example, it would be very unusual to encounter a 30 year-old claimant of a valid, randomized SSN used on July 1, 2011, who was born and has resided in the United States. If the randomized SSN is correct, it would (generally) mean that the person had never been claimed as a dependent for income tax purposes and had never been in the labor force prior to June, 2011. While it is both theoretically and legally possible to encounter such persons in the course of business, they are relatively rare.

Additional, related information is available on our website through these links:

[Fraud Detection and Identity Validation with SecureID™](#) – “The best place to deploy your anti-fraud defense is to catch the offender at the door...”

[The American Financial System's Identity Problem](#) – “The United States relies on the Social Security Number (SSN) as its de facto national identification number...”

[Simulation Studies of Social Security Number Validation](#) – “... This simple technique of Social Security Number validation is highly recommended for Customer Identification Programs, particularly at the time of account inception...”

["Exaggerated" Deaths in SSA's Death Master File](#) – “... Since the 1930s, deaths of social security number holders have been reported to the Social Security Administration (SSA).”

Contact Information

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