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Removing Social Security Numbers

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for Faculty and Staff

Why?

Social Security Numbers (SSN) are among the types of sensitive information considered “restricted data” that The Ohio State University must safeguard from misuse and theft. These steps will help you find and remove them from stored computer files or encrypt the files you want to keep. While university policy prohibits storage of sensitive information on non-university owned devices, you are discouraged from saving this information on portable storage devices.

Get Help

The instructions presented here, and explained in more detail on the BuckeyeSecure web site, can help you securely remove SSN from your computers. You are encouraged to seek assistance and learn more about local practices and procedures from your college or departmental technical support staff. You can also send e-mail to 8help@osu.edu or call 688-HELP (4357).

More Information

Find more information and resources on protecting personal information, best practices, and ID theft at buckeyesecure.osu.edu.

Prepare

To determine if there are files with SSN on your computer, use one of the suggested programs available on the web site to scan your computer for SSN-like patterns and produce a report listing the names of files that may contain SSN.

Note: This report will yield false positives. To minimize false positives, delete web browser caches to eliminate any stored web pages on your computer.

- ⇒ Get SSN scanning tools and step-by-step instructions on running them at buckeyesecure.osu.edu/locateSSN.

Decide

Once you generate a report, use it as a guide to review each identified file and then *Delete*, *Remove SSN*, or *Protect* as described below. Also make sure to take the same actions with any files with sensitive information that you may have on portable storage devices or media (USB drives, PDAs, CDs, and any others). Get step-by-step instructions at buckeyesecure.osu.edu/removeSSN.

- ⇒ Delete entire file containing SSN if you no longer need it.
- ⇒ Remove SSN from a file you need to keep, whether it's a Word document or any other type of file. Note that Excel spreadsheets require special actions.
- ⇒ Keep a file with SSN but protect it with encryption using the following procedure.

Protect

Encryption hides legible information by converting it into encoded text. Run the encryption software that comes with your computer to make a file with SSN unreadable.

Note: Encryption keys are linked to your passwords. Forgotten or improperly changed passwords can cause you to lose access to encrypted files. Safeguard your passwords and regularly work with technology staff to create secure backups of needed files.

- ⇒ Use EFS on Windows and FileVault on Macintosh. Get step-by-step instructions at buckeyesecure.osu.edu/encryption.