



**CRAIG BROWN**  
**COLUMBIANA COUNTY RECORDER**

Courthouse • 105 South Market • Lisbon, Ohio 44432 • Phone: 330-424-9517 ext. 640 • Fax: 330-424-5067

### **Recorder Covering Social Security Numbers**

Columbiana County Recorder Craig Brown has announced he will begin blacking-out or masking social security numbers on public documents. The program is voluntary and interested persons should contact Brown for more information. Brown said that he was taking “a proactive approach to county government by limiting the possibility of identity theft via county documents.” He justified his new program by explaining that a number of documents stored by recorders contain social security numbers.

Some documents filed in the office have social security numbers because of federal or state law. For example federal tax liens have social security numbers. Other documents, never required by law to have social security numbers, sometimes included the numbers as a form of identification.

Concerning the program Brown said, “Throughout my term I have been very concerned about the possibility of public information being used for illegal activities.” Brown said that “the program is a barrier or a line of defense against what has become a growing problem.”

In recent months, Ohio has been faced with challenges from incidents where social security numbers and other personal information have been stolen from state government. Data pertaining to hundreds of thousands of Ohioans was stolen when a device was stolen from a state intern’s vehicle.

Brown explained that the best way to combat identity theft is to make it difficult for thieves to access the information. He admitted that this is difficult for county government because state law requires that county records be available for inspection.

Brown said that recorders have two things to think about when dealing with social security numbers issues, “One we need to keep an unaltered original document and two we need to think about the harm that could occur if these numbers fell into the wrong hands.”

According to Ohio law county recorders are not permitted to destroy or permanently erase social security numbers. Ohio law also requires that recorders maintain copies or images of unaltered documents. Brown said that he is in compliance with the law because his office will keep an unaltered copy of every document.

Brown explained that if an individual wants a social security number covered on the computer the number will be masked or blacked out. Likewise documents with social security numbers stored in book form will be replaced with copies of the original documents with social security numbers blacked out. “What we are doing is deterring illegal use of social security numbers,” stated Brown. He continued, “We aren’t destroying or altering documents. We are just adding a layer of protection to those documents.”

In order to participate in the program, individuals will have to complete a form requesting the recorder’s office to mask social security numbers from public view. The form is simple and basically just wants to know if the requesting party is the individual referred to on the document. The masking or blacking-out of social security numbers applies to documents stored as computer images or in books.

Due to a limited number of staff members Brown is requesting that people know the location or book and page number of their documents before submitting document-masking requests.

He suggests that interested parties visit the recorder’s office and personally examine their documents for social security numbers.

In order to expedite service please contact County Recorder Craig Brown personally and schedule an appointment to discuss or to participate in the program at (330) 424-9517 ext. 1351 or via email [cbrown@ccclerk.org](mailto:cbrown@ccclerk.org).