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COLUMBIANA COUNTY RECORDER
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Columbiana County Recorder
Craig Brown
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GAO Report Released On County Records

Columbiana County Recorder Craig Brown has reviewed and agrees with a report released by the United States Government Accountability Office regarding social security numbers on public documents.

"Basically, what the report tells me, as a county recorder, is that our policies are on the right track and the concerns we share are common concerns throughout the country," stated Brown.

The report states that many counties, like Columbiana County, have taken steps to prevent identity theft by masking or covering up social security numbers.

Brown has created two programs to address the issue of identity theft prevention. A staff member is currently reviewing documents and individuals can request to have their records reviewed and social security numbers masked.

The report concluded that many county records professionals are taking steps to minimize the risk of identity theft by covering up or masking social security numbers and that concerns are being raised regarding the bulk sales of county records.

Recorder echoed the committee's concern by stating, "I've heard stories about documents being processed in places like India and the Philippines. There is a real concern that information from these documents may be altered or used to assist criminals."

"It is a fairly common practice for large companies to purchase large quantities of records in order to sell access to that information," continued Brown.

In many states there are little or no restrictions regarding the selling or usage of publicly available records.

I don't think large bulk record sells are especially common in Ohio because the laws are written to require a record request to be specific," Brown continued, "really so much of it comes down to the interpretation of law by the recorder and the county prosecutor."

As recorder, Brown said that he has never fulfilled a bulk records request because the requests have never been detailed enough to qualify.

"When people ask for bulk records I mail them a copy of our office's records policy and inform them of what it costs to purchase the requested records," stated Brown.

Brown added, "At that point most companies don't respond, I guess they figure the project is cost prohibitive or not worth the effort of following the law and making a proper request."

The report was prepared for the U.S. Senate's Subcommittee on Administrative Oversight and the Courts Subcommittee on the Judiciary. The Ohio Recorders Association provided Brown the report for review.