

Protect your SSN:

Don't include it on publicly disclosed forms

Your Social Security number (SSN) is a gateway into your credit/financial information and a desired asset for any identity thief.

The IRS realizes the importance of keeping it secure and strongly advises exempt organizations not to include SSNs on publicly disclosed forms.

- Don't put Social Security numbers on applications for tax-exempt status or any 990 series information return.
- Don't include them on the form or any attachments.

The *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, a publication for nonprofit leaders, fundraisers and grant makers based in Washington, D.C., stated in a recent article that nearly one in five exempt organizations – 20 percent – have submitted forms with one or more Social Security numbers.

- Most SSNs were those of donors, trustees, employees, directors and scholarship winners.
- Slightly more than a third of the SSNs were tax preparers (not using PTINs). The study's information used 2001-2006 returns.

In some cases, an organization took a document prepared for some non-tax purpose that contained SSNs – a list of scholarship winners, for example – and attached it to the Form 990.

Small organizations aren't the only culprits making these errors.

The *Chronicle* reviewed the Forms 990 of the 12 organizations at the top of its Philanthropy 400 ranking of charities.

Of the 12, three organizations – 25% – had published at least one Social Security number.

The burden isn't yours alone.

The IRS put a reminder in the disclosable forms and their instructions, including:

- Form 990 & 990-EZ
- Form 990-PF
- Form 5227
- Form 990-T
- Forms 1023 & 1024 (On the notice attached to return)

So remember, protect your identity and refrain from putting SSNs on disclosable IRS forms.