

Implementing Effective Privacy Programs

**Office of the Privacy Advocate
Internal Revenue Service**

What is Privacy?

“The right to be let alone...”

- Each individual has their own definition of privacy. Privacy generally means keeping others from having control over one's life or property.
- Privacy is an outgrowth of the Constitution, e.g, the Fourth Amendment's guarantee of freedom from “illegal search and seizure.”
- Historically, privacy referred to a personal or physical intrusion, but that was long before the electronic age.

What is Privacy Today?

- Today the public is also concerned about their informational privacy.
- Data mining, data warehousing, cookies, profiling, worms, identity theft--these concepts frighten and concern the public as potentially dangerous invasions of privacy.
- The Office of the Privacy Advocate was created to address these concerns.

IRS Office of the Privacy Advocate

In January 1993, the Commissioner determined that taxpayers' right to privacy warranted the establishment of an executive position to oversee their privacy interests and to ensure that privacy protection strategies are integrated into all IRS modernization efforts.

The Office of the Privacy Advocate assists the Operating and Functional Divisions in protecting taxpayer and employee privacy by ensuring that we collect and use the minimum amount of information necessary to fulfill our statutory responsibilities.

Our Mission

To create, promote, and support privacy programs and privacy awareness throughout the Internal Revenue Service

Key Initiatives

Privacy protections, such as the “fair information practices,” require that every individual has the right to:

Be notified when information is collected about them;
Consent to the information being collected;
Review the information;
Amend the information.

The tools we use to implement privacy protections:

Privacy Impact Assessments (PIAs)
Web Site Privacy Notices
IRS Privacy Principles

Strategic Activities

- Our office works closely with the business owners and system developers to ensure that they build privacy features into all of our programs, and to ensure that IRS is at the forefront of preserving taxpayer privacy.
- We provide Service-wide privacy training and briefings to enhance privacy awareness at every level.
- We partner with privacy professionals in other government agencies and external organizations to share knowledge; stay abreast of emerging privacy issues and technologies; and provide support and guidance.

Office Resources

Office of the Privacy Advocate:

Telephone: 202-927-5170;

fax: 202-622-4335

Charlene Thomas, Lisa Brendes,

Vince Curtin, Sabrina Dawson,

Susan Dennis, Tim Ladusky,

Bill Reeder, Mary Ronan

Please click through the rest of our web site to learn more about privacy in federal government systems and programs.