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GPS Coordinates

USE OF GLOBAL POSITIONING SYSTEMS

Why is the Census Bureau using Global Positioning Systems (GPS)?

- The Census Bureau uses Global Positioning Systems (GPS) to help locate addresses. The handheld computer is equipped with GPS and is used during our address canvassing operation. Address canvassing is a field operation where census workers systematically travel all known and new streets and roads to identify every structure where people live or could potentially live and update our address list and maps. For the 2010 Census, we attempted to collect GPS coordinates for each structure to make sure it is recorded in the correct location. The census workers also confirmed, added and deleted addresses using a GPS-equipped hand held computer. All this work was done to ensure a complete and accurate address list for delivering the 2010 Census questionnaires next year.
- GPS technology allows us to reduce the amount of time spent by census workers in locating addresses. The new electronic technology replaces a paper-based operation, providing faster, more accurate and secure collection of information.

Why is the accuracy of our address critical for the success of the 2010 Census?

- The exact geographic location of each housing unit is critical to ensure that when we publish the census results for the entire country, broken down by various geographic areas ranging from states, counties, and cities, to census blocks, we accurately represent the data for the area in question. If we correctly collect the information for a household, but incorrectly allocate that information to the wrong geographic area - not the one in which it is actually located - this will result in inaccurate data for two geographic areas.
- The Census counts are used for three major activities: apportionment (the number of seats in Congress to which each state is entitled); redistricting, (the determination of boundaries for Congressional districts); and distribution of more than \$400 billion in federal funds each year to state, tribal, and local governments. It is imperative that our counts are accurate in each geographic location, such as states, tribal reservations, counties, cities, towns, or census tracts and blocks.

Are the GPS coordinates collected during the 2010 Census operation kept confidential?

- Yes. All address information, including GPS coordinates, is protected by the confidentiality requirements of Title 13 of the United States Code. Census Bureau employees take an oath for life to protect identifiable information and information about businesses gathered by the agency. By law, the Census Bureau cannot share respondents' answers with the IRS, FBI, CIA, or any other government agency. The penalty for unlawful disclosure is a fine of up to \$250,000 or imprisonment of up to 5 years, or both.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau | Privacy Office | Last Revised: December 17, 2009