

Department of Veterans Affairs Statement
Announcing the Loss of Veterans' Personal Information
May 22, 2006

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has recently learned that an employee, a data analyst, took home electronic data from the VA, which he was not authorized to do. This behavior was in violation of our policies. This data contained identifying information including names, social security numbers, and dates of birth for up to 26.5 million veterans and some spouses, as well as some disability ratings. Importantly, the affected data did not include any of VA's electronic health records nor any financial information. The employee's home was burglarized and this data was stolen. The employee has been placed on administrative leave pending the outcome of an investigation.

Appropriate law enforcement agencies, including the FBI and the VA Inspector General's office, have launched full-scale investigations into this matter. Authorities believe it is unlikely the perpetrators targeted the items because of any knowledge of the data contents. It is possible that they remain unaware of the information which they possess or of how to make use of it. However, out of an abundance of caution, the VA is taking all possible steps to protect and inform our veterans.

The VA is working with members of Congress, the news media, veterans service organizations, and other government agencies to help ensure that those veterans and their families are aware of the situation and of the steps they may take to protect themselves from misuse of their personal information. The VA will send out individual notification letters to veterans to every extent possible. Veterans can also go to www.firstgov.gov as well as www.va.gov/opa to get more information on this matter. The [firstgov](http://www.firstgov.gov) web site is being set to handle increased web traffic. Additionally, working with other government agencies, the VA has set up a manned call center that veterans may call to get information about this situation and learn more about consumer identity protections. That toll-free number is 1-800-FED INFO (333-4636). The call center will be open beginning today, and will operate from 8 am to 9 pm (EDT), Monday-Saturday as long as it is needed. The call center will be able to handle up to 20,000 calls per hour (260,000 calls per day).

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs R. James Nicholson has briefed the Attorney General and the Chairman of the Federal Trade Commission, co-chairs of the President's Identity Theft Task Force. Task Force members have already taken actions to protect the affected veterans, including working with the credit bureaus to help ensure that veterans receive the free credit report they are entitled to under the law. Additionally, the Task Force will meet today, 22 May 2006, to coordinate the comprehensive Federal response, recommend further ways to protect affected veterans, and increase safeguards to prevent the reoccurrence of such incidents.

The VA's mission to serve and honor our nation's veterans is one we take very seriously and the 235,000 VA employees are deeply saddened by any concern or anxiety this incident may cause our veterans and their families. We appreciate the service our veterans have given their country and we are working diligently to protect them from any harm as a result of this incident.