THE UNDER SECRETARY OF THE NAVY
WASHINGTON DC 20350-1000

February 12, 2010

MEMORANDUM FOR ASSISTANT COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS
VICE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS
ASSISTANT SECRETARIES OF THE NAVY
GENERAL COUNSEL OF THE NAVY

SUBJECT: Safeguarding Personally Identifiable Information (PII)

During the past year, the Department of the Navy (DON) experienced repeated inadvertent releases of personally identifiable information (PII) for Navy and Marine Corps military and civilian personnel and their dependents. The most common problem was the unauthorized release of personal Social Security Numbers (SSNs).

Our Sailors, Marines, and civilians, along with their dependents, expect us to keep their PII safe, and it is our charge to ensure that all systems and processes we employ adequately safeguard this information. We cannot tolerate the continued loss of this data as it directly impacts the morale, security, and financial well-being of our personnel. I want to convey the seriousness I place on personal privacy and the safe management of DON PII, and intend to make eradicating further PII breaches a Departmental priority.

While we cannot control all factors that contribute to the unauthorized release of PII, we can and must do better. In this regard, we are implementing a DON-wide plan to reduce the collection and use of SSNs. We will also accelerate the implementation of data-at-rest (DAR) encryption software and employ the use of new software tools to restrict the use and display of sensitive privacy information. We will establish stricter procedures for the disposal and accountability of all electronic media capable of PII data storage. Moreover, since eighty percent of PII breach incidents are the result of human error, we will improve the training of personnel who routinely handle PII. To help determine the effectiveness of these moves, I have directed the Naval Audit Service to continue measuring the adequacy of Departmental measures designed to safeguard PII.

These foregoing steps should help reduce the number of DON PII breaches. However, we must never let process take the place of good leadership. When PII breaches occur, I expect leadership to take immediate, corrective action to mitigate further data losses and to minimize the risk of financial harm to our personnel. When circumstances dictate, individuals responsible for the loss of PII should be held accountable for their actions. I expect all leaders, managers, and supervisors within the Department to step up their efforts to ensure DON PII guidance and polices are consistently and diligently followed.

The Department of the Navy has a proud and honored tradition for taking care of its people and their families. Through your personal involvement, I am confident we will succeed in dramatically improving the way we safeguard privacy information of every single person in the DON

Robert O. Work

Cc:
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