

AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY – IT’S THE REAL DEAL

I receive scores of calls, visits, and emails every month, from folks who got a phone call or something in the mail. They wonder if what they got is a scam. And about 95 times out of 100, I can tell them, “yup, it’s a scam” and we go from there on what to do next.

But, not everything is a scam. The American Community Survey is the number one thing people ask me about, which is not a scam. I get enough calls about the American Community Survey, I decided I need to educate readers on this topic.

Folks calling on this topic usually tell me something like this...”I got this letter from the Census Bureau, wanting me to fill out this form. The form is really long, and they are asking me for a lot of personal information. Is this for real? Do I need to fill it out?”

The answers – yes and yes.

Here’s the history of the thing. The US Constitution in Article 1, Section 2, ordered a census or “enumeration” of the population every ten years. Since taxes and representation were based on population, the Constitution authors realized they needed an accurate count. The Constitution further authorized Congress to conduct the count “in such manner as they shall by Law direct.” Up until 1954, Congress passed legislation each ten years, setting up this decennial census. In 1954, Congress passed legislation, the “Census Act”, delegating the authority to set the manner of the census to the Secretary of Commerce.

Up until 2000, the Census Bureau used a “short-form” and a “long-form” sent to every household. Most households received the short form, which pretty much just collected information on numbers of people, their ages, and so forth. The long form collected a lot more information. In 2000, the Census Bureau discontinued the long form, and replaced it with the American Community Survey. This was done to allow the collection of continuous, “real-time” statistics, rather than waiting ten years for another census.

This is what the Census Bureau says about the American Community Survey.

“The American Community Survey helps local officials, community leaders and businesses understand the changes taking place in their communities. It is the premier source for detailed information about the American people and workforce.”

They further explain, the statistics developed from the survey are available to government, private industry, or anyone really, to allow better planning and understanding of our society. Notice I wrote, “the statistics” are available. All names, addresses, or other identifying information are stripped out of the statistics. The Census Bureau does not maintain any national database with names or addresses collected in the survey.

The Census Bureau website tells us, they send out 295,000 surveys each month, to randomly selected addresses. The addresses are intended to be representative of geographic areas or neighborhood. You have a 480 to 1 chance in any given month of getting this survey. Those getting this survey first receive a pre-notice telling them to expect this survey. Then a couple of weeks later, the survey arrives by mail. You are encouraged to complete the survey online, but you can finish it by mail and send it back that way.

What happens if you ignore the survey? Then the Census Bureau will be a pest until you complete it. They will re-send the form. They will try to call you by phone. If all else fails, they will send out interviewers for personal contact. You are legally obligated to complete the survey. The Census Bureau compares it to things like jury duty, paying taxes, or getting a drivers license to drive. It's a civic duty.

Many people calling me ask why the Census Bureau asks questions about the size of their house, their plumbing, their income, or their commute time. The Census Bureau website gives detailed explanations on why they ask the questions they do, and how they organize the statistics for use. I encourage you to visit their website at www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs. Or just google American Community Survey.

GRANDPARENT SCAM FINDS A VICTIM

A Clinton man, Tom, found out this scam is still coming at us. Tom contacted me last week, to tell me he received a call from someone who "sounded just like my grandson". The caller told a story of traveling to the Dominican Republic and getting involved in a car accident. The police who came to the accident found two pounds of marijuana in the trunk of the rental car. The police turned the caller over to the US Embassy. At this point, the caller gave the phone over to a US Marine Corp sergeant at the embassy. The Marine said for \$985, the embassy would make sure the grandson's record stayed clean.

Tom wanted to help out his grandson, so went to his bank, withdrew the cash, and sent it by wire transfer to the Dominican Republic. A few hours later, he started to feel suspicious about this and started asking questions of relatives. Too late.

Here's the warning from Tom, his words, not mine, "Check with your banker, check with the police, check with someone before you do anything." Tom also noted his grandson told him not to tell anyone else in the family, something we recognize as a huge red flag. "If they tell you not to call anyone, do it anyway."

I noticed more calls from people reporting this scam to me in the last six weeks, but I felt comforted everyone recognized this as a scam. Tom knew this scam existed also, but what sounded like his grandson's voice, pleading for help, temporarily disabled his reasoning, and

allowed emotion to take over. Which is exactly the effect scammers hope for. They won this time.

CONTACT SENIORS VS. CRIME

Let me know about scams, fraud, or other crookedness you run across. Most of what I learn, I learn from you. Contact me at Seniors vs. Crime, Clinton County Sheriff's Office, 563-242-9211 extension 4433, or email me at randymeier@gapa911.us

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