



United States
Department of
Agriculture

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Office of the Chief
Information Officer

1400 Independence
Avenue SW

Washington, DC
20250

TO: All USDA Employees and Contractors

FROM: Christopher L. Smith
Chief Information Officer
Office of the Chief Information Officer

SUBJECT: Minimum Safeguards for Protecting Personally Identifiable Information

The purpose of this memorandum is to establish Department-wide policy and minimum standards for protecting and preventing the loss or unauthorized access to electronic and paper-based Personally Identifiable Information (PII). Protection of PII is an important part of everyone's job. In accordance with established Office of Management and Budget (OMB) guidance contained in M-06-15, "*Safeguarding Personally Identifiable Information*" and M-06-16, "*Protection of Sensitive Agency Information*", the Department is responsible for implementing policy to ensure the adequate protection of PII and other sensitive agency data.

The OMB defines PII data as any combination of information about an individual maintained by the agency, including but not limited to name, social security number, date of birth, maiden name, biometric record number, home address, education, financial transactions, medical history, criminal or employment history, and information which can be used to distinguish or trace an individual's identity.

All USDA Department employees, contractors, and partners who handle PII data in the performance of their duties must safeguard and protect PII data in every form (electronic or paper based) and exercise extra diligence during the electronic and physical movement of PII data to and from USDA and other federal or private sites. USDA Employees and contractors are not authorized to remove PII or other sensitive data from the workplace without prior written authorization of the unit's manager or other authorized senior agency official. USDA employees who violate this policy may be subject to disciplinary actions in accordance with established policies.

In light of advancements in technology for accessing information contained on unencrypted storage media and the increased number of PII incidents throughout the Department, this memorandum requires all Department employees, contractors, and partners to encrypt the data or the file to be transmitted with a minimum approved form of encryption prior to transmitting PII or other sensitive data from the Department. USDA employees should consult their agency Information Technology (IT) helpdesk or Chief Information Officer (CIO) for assistance with satisfying this requirement prior to transporting PII and other sensitive data.

USDA employees and contractors are reminded that safeguarding and moving paper-based PII data is just as important and, as such, shall be afforded the highest level of protection when transporting or shipping PII data via US Mail or other authorized air and ground carriers. Instructions and guidance regarding the physical movement of PII data via an authorized physical transport mechanism can be found at the following link:
http://www.ocio.net.usda.gov/ocio/security/docs/PII_Poster3SMALL.pdf

If you have any questions regarding this memorandum, please contact Ms. Ray Payton, Chief Privacy Officer at (202)720-8755.