

Census day has passed, so now what?

Written by Pharaoh Martin □ NNPA National Correspondent
Friday, 09 April 2010 12:32

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - Census Day, April 1, has passed but that doesn't mean it's too late to turn in your 10-question Census form. The Census Bureau will continue to accept 2010 Census questionnaires by mail through mid-April. □

For households that fail to mail back their forms, census workers will begin making door to door visits beginning May 1, and will continue doing so until mid-July. □ Census data determines crucial dollar allocations and political representation within communities. The data determines the apportionment of congressional seats to states. It also determines the distribution of more than \$4 trillion dollars in federal funds to local governments and communities over the next decade and lays the groundwork for what community services will be provided.

Still, only 54 percent of the nation's estimated 145 million households mailed back their census forms on April 1, reports the U. S Census Bureau. April 1 was the official deadline day to reply to the Census so that the federal government can begin conducting the nation's decennial headcount, as mandated by the U.S. Constitution. □ The 2010 U.S. Census will cost taxpayers almost \$12 billion, according to a 2008 budget request submitted by the Department of Commerce, making it the most expensive count ever.

"The Census Bureau and I would like to thank everyone who has already taken 10 minutes to fill out and mail back the 2010 Census," Census Bureau Director Robert Groves said in a statement. "For those who have not yet had a chance to send it back, I'd like to reiterate that it's not too late to participate and doing so will save a lot of taxpayer money." □ The massive address canvassing operation will cost taxpayers an average of \$57 per household versus the 42 cents it takes to get a response back by mail to send a census taker door-to-door to collect the same information that they didn't mail it back.

Approximately 140,000 census takers will follow-up in person with every single address that doesn't mail back a form in order. So if the Census form is still sitting on your coffee table expect a visit by a public worker carrying a U.S. Census Bureau badge. For the first time, workers will also carry around GPS-enabled handheld computers to record data. The handheld devices will improve accuracy of the count and precision of geographic data gathered, according to the Census Bureau.

In the case that nobody answers, a census taker will visit a home up to three times. A census taker can only ask census form-related questions but may require your phone number in order to follow up with questions regarding incomplete information. □ "If we feel that you may have a discrepancy with your questionnaire we'll call you back," said 2010 Census chief operating officer Arnold Jackson in an earlier interview with NNPA News Service. "We may call eight million households out of 145 million." □ By law, the Census Bureau is not allowed to share respondents' answers with any other governmental agency such as the FBI, the CIA or welfare and immigration agencies, nor with any court of law or even with the President of the United States. Its employees take an oath for life to keep census information confidential. Failure to uphold that oath is punishable by a fine of up to \$250,000 and five years in prison. □

If you did not receive a form or need a replacement, call the Telephone Questionnaire Assistance center at 1-866-872-6868. □

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You can also pick up what's called a "Be Counted" form from a service-based location such as a soup kitchen or a homeless shelter. Be Counted forms were designed to count people who are displaced or who lack a permanent address but can also be used for people who never received a form. The Census Bureau has said that people are not able to fill out forms online but they are experimenting with allowing Internet submissions in future Census counts.