Study Finds Active Duty Military Highly Susceptible to Identity Theft

January 11, 2011 - A recently released study, conducted by professors at the US Military Academy at West Point, NY, has found that active duty members of the US military are highly susceptible to becoming victims of identity theft. The study places the responsibility for its findings squarely on the shoulders of the armed forces; all of which continue to require military personnel to disclose their social security numbers regularly.

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"The systematic leaks of personal information in day-to-day operations, and a pervasive attitude of disregard for personal privacy is unsettling," the report says. "The military culture is one of widespread compulsory Social Security number disclosure."

The report calls various practices observed by the armed forces into question. Among these are requiring the disclosure of SSNs when active duty personnel cash personal checks at facilities located outside of the United States. It also makes mention of the fact that social security numbers and birth dates are printed on travel orders and military ID cards.

Among the more remarkable disclosures included in the report was that military personnel are required to write the last four digits of their SSN on laundry bags. There have been a wide variety of recent reports showing how easy it is for someone with access to last four digits of a social security number to guess the rest of the number if they can find out your home town and can take an educated guess at when you were born.

There is absolutely no reason for SSNs to appear on either military IDs or on travel orders. Most colleges and universities have already replaced SSNs with student ID numbers not related to SSNs because of the ID theft threat to students. The US armed forces need to take the same precaution to protect active duty personnel. It should also be pointed out that the armed forces actually had an ID numbering system in place that didn't involve SSNs through World War II. It might be time to return to that system now.

byJim Malmberg
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