



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON

Dear Veteran:

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has recently learned that an employee took home electronic data from the VA, which he was not authorized to do and was in violation of established policies. The employee's home was burglarized and this data was stolen. The data contained identifying information including names, social security numbers, and dates of birth for up to 26.5 million veterans and some spouses, as well as some disability ratings. As a result of this incident, information identifiable with you was potentially exposed to others. It is important to note that the affected data did not include any of VA's electronic health records or any financial information.

Appropriate law enforcement agencies, including the FBI and the VA Inspector General's office, have launched full-scale investigations into this matter. Authorities believe it is unlikely the perpetrators targeted the items because of any knowledge of the data contents.

Out of an abundance of caution, however, VA is taking all possible steps to protect and inform our veterans. While you do not need to take any action unless you are aware of suspicious activity regarding your personal information, there are many steps you may take to protect against possible identity theft and we wanted you to be aware of these. Specific information is included in the enclosed question and answer sheet. For additional information, the VA has teamed up with the Federal Trade Commission and has a Web site (www.firstgov.gov) with information on this matter or you may call 1-800-FED-INFO (1-800-333-4636). The call center will operate from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. (EDT), Monday-Saturday, as long as it is needed.

Beware of any phone calls, e-mails, and other communications from individuals claiming to be from VA or other official sources, asking for your personal information or verification of it. This is often referred to as information solicitation or "phishing." VA, other government agencies, and other legitimate organizations will not contact you to ask for or to confirm your personal information. If you receive such communications, they should be reported to VA at 1-800-FED-INFO (1-800-333-4636).

We apologize for any inconvenience or concern this situation may cause, but we at VA believe it is important for you to be fully informed of any potential risk resulting from this incident. Again, we want to reassure you we have no evidence that your protected data has been misused. We will keep you apprised of any further developments. The men and women of the VA take our obligation to honor and serve America's veterans very seriously and we are committed to ensuring that this never happens again.

In accordance with current policy, the Internal Revenue Service has agreed to forward this letter because we do not have current addresses for all affected individuals. The IRS has not disclosed your address or any other tax information to us.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. James Nicholson", written over a horizontal line.

R. James Nicholson

Enclosure

May 2006