

## Critical Links

### Names and Social Security Numbers

Each year employers send Copy A of Forms W-2 to Social Security. Social Security matches the name and Social Security number (SSN) on each Form W-2 against its database of all SSNs issued. When we find a match, we record the earnings information from the Form W-2 in the employee's earnings history.

The earnings history is the basis for determining an employee's future eligibility and benefit amount for Social Security's retirement, disability, and survivors programs. That is why it is critical that each employee's name and SSN, as shown on their Social Security card, match your payroll records and year-end Forms W-2.

The Internal Revenue Service's [Publication 15 \(Circular E, Employer's Tax Guide\)](#) contains instructions for recording employees' names and SSNs. The tax guide states that after an employee is hired, you should ask to see his or her Social Security card. The employee may show the card if it is available. You may, but are not required to, photocopy the card.

### How to Make the Critical Link

**Update Your Payroll Records** - Ask employees to verify their name and SSN before you close out your books and prepare the Forms W-2. If a name has changed, continue to use the old name and tell the employee to contact Social Security to obtain an updated card. Using a new name before the employee updates Social Security's records may prevent the posting of earnings to the employee's earnings history. Change your payroll records only after the employee obtains an updated Social Security card with the new name.

**Avoid These Common Errors** - Incorrect or misspelled names; incorrect SSN; using nicknames or shortened names; titles before or after the name; and name changes not reported to Social Security.

**Verify Names/SSNs with Social Security** - Use Social Security's free Internet service, the Social Security Number Verification Service (SSNVS), to match employees' names and SSNs at the time they are hired or before you prepare and submit your Forms W-2. There are two Internet verification options.

You can:

- Verify up to 10 names and SSNs (per screen) and receive immediate results-- An option ideal to verify new hires.
- Upload overnight files of up to 250,000 names and SSNs and generally receive results the next government business day--An option ideal to verify an entire payroll database or if you hire a large number of workers at one time.

While SSNVS is available to all employers and third-party submitters, you must register to use this service. You can only use this service to verify current or former employees and only for wage reporting (Form W-2) purposes.

### **To Register**

Go to the [Business Services Online \(BSO\) Welcome](#) page and complete the registration process where you will create your own password, receive a User ID, and select your services, including SSNVS.

We will mail a one-time activation code to your employer. When you receive the activation code, return to the [BSO Welcome](#) page, select Log In and provide your User ID and password. Select, Enter Your Activation Code and enter your activation code. You will then be able to use the service.

For more information about SSNVS, read [The Social Security Number Verification Service](#).

If you discover an employee's SSN is incorrect, you should ask to see the employee's Social Security card to ensure the name and SSN shows correctly in your payroll records. If the information on the card matches your payroll records, ask the employee to check with [any Social Security Office](#) to determine and correct the problem. Document any action you take to obtain the correct name or SSN and continue to report the employee's earnings using the SSN given to you. If you receive a corrected name or SSN from the employee after you filed the Form W-2, submit a Form W-2C to make the correction.

### **Helpful Hints**

#### **Use the Correct Name Format**

Enter the name on the Form W-2 as shown on the employee's Social Security card. Connect parts of a compound name with either a hyphen or a blank space. Do not join compound names into a single word. If an employee has a compound name, include all parts of the name in the appropriate name field. For example, the name John R Smith-Jones: Enter Smith Jones in the last name field.

It is especially important to report the exact last name. If an employee provides a name with an apparent compound or multiple last names, ask the employee which name is the beginning of the last name and which (if any) is the middle name.

### **Paper Forms W-2 Submitted to Social Security**

Do not show titles or academic degrees, such as Dr., RN, or Esq., at the beginning or end of the worker's name. If the Social Security card contains a middle name, always complete the Form W-2 using just the middle initial (with no punctuation).

### **[Specifications for Filing Forms W-2 Electronically \(EFW2\)](#)**

You can enter a suffix; e.g., Jr., Sr., in location 62-65 of the Code RW, Employee Wage Record. The field for the middle name or initial is 15 spaces. You may enter either the middle initial or the full middle name.

It is acceptable to use the Specifications for Filing Forms W-2 Electronically format for employee copies of the Form W-2 even though it may contain suffixes, middle names, etc. Paper instructions refer only to Copy A of the Form W-2 that is submitted to Social Security.

### **Use the Correct SSN**

Enter the SSN shown on the employee's Social Security card. If you hire someone who does not have a Social Security card available, you can use the free Social Security Number Verification Service (SSNVS) to quickly verify whether a person's name and SSN matches Social Security's records or you can ask him or her to obtain one as soon as possible. If you have already submitted a Form W-2 before the employee obtains a card, complete and submit a Form W-2C to make the correction. For more information about Social Security numbers, read our [Social Security Number Randomization Frequently Asked Questions](#).

### **Forms W-2 Submitted to Social Security on Paper**

If you still do not have an employee's SSN when your Form W-2 report is due, complete the SSN field by entering: *Applied For* in Box *d* on the paper Form W-2.

### **[Specifications for Filing Forms W-2 Electronically \(EFW2\)](#)**

If you still do not have an SSN when your Form W-2 report is due, complete the SSN field by entering all zeros in locations 3 through 11 of the Code RW, Employee Wage Record. The paper Forms W-2 you give to employees also may have all zeros in block **d**, Employee SSN.

Social Security Publication 20-005, ICN# 437010N