

With the U.S. Census process beginning, the Better Business Bureau (BBB) advises people to be cooperative, but cautious, so as not to become a victim of fraud or identity theft.

The first phase of the 2010 U.S. Census is under way, as workers have begun verifying the addresses of households across the country.

Eventually, more than 140,000 U.S. Census workers will count every person in the United States and will gather information about every person living at each address including name, age, gender, race, and other relevant data.

The big question is - how do you tell the difference between a U.S. Census worker and a con artist?

BBB offers the following advice:

If a U.S. Census worker knocks on your door, they will have: a badge, a handheld device, a Census Bureau canvas bag, and a confidentiality notice.

Ask to see their identification and their badge before answering their questions. However, you should never invite anyone you don't know into your home.

Census workers are currently only knocking on doors to verify address information.

Do not give your Social Security number, credit card or banking information to anyone, even if they claim they need it for the U.S. Census.

REMEMBER, NO MATTER WHAT THEY ASK, YOU REALLY ONLY NEED TO TELL THEM HOW MANY PEOPLE LIVE AT YOUR ADDRESS.

While the Census Bureau might ask for basic financial information, such as a salary range, YOU DON'T HAVE TO ANSWER ANYTHING AT ALL ABOUT YOUR FINANCIAL SITUATION.

The Census Bureau will not ask for Social Security, bank account, or credit card numbers, nor will employees solicit donations. Any one asking for that information is NOT with the Census Bureau.

AND REMEMBER, THE CENSUS BUREAU HAS DECIDED NOT TO WORK WITH ACORN ON GATHERING THIS INFORMATION.

No Acorn worker should approach you saying he/she is with the Census Bureau.

Eventually, Census workers may contact you by telephone, mail, or in person at home.

However, the Census Bureau will not contact you by Email, so be on the lookout for Email scams impersonating the Census.

Never click on a link or open any attachments in an Email that are supposedly from the U.S. Census Bureau.

For more advice on avoiding identity theft and fraud