

How do I find out if someone is deceased?

by Noah W - Friday, March 14, 2008

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A Social Security Death Records search also known as Social Security Death Index "SSDI" is a database of death records available online from many resources. It is included in most reverse social security number lookup searches.

This list is a brief history of the SSDI:

- August 14, 1935 - President Franklin D. Roosevelt signs the Social Security Act into law.
- 1936-1937 - Approximately 30 million U.S. residents apply for and receive Social Security numbers.
- Jan 1, 1937 - Workers begin acquiring credits toward old-age insurance benefits, and payroll tax (FICA) withholding begins.
- 1947 - Application for Social Security number no longer includes employer information.
- 1962 - Electronic requests for benefits become commonly used, resulting in what is known as the Social Security Death Index.
- 1963 - Issuance of Social Security numbers beginning with 700-728 to railroad employees was discontinued.
- 1965 - President Lyndon B. Johnson signs Medicare into law. Many citizens over age 65 receive Social Security cards for the first time.
- 1967 - Department of Defense begins using Social Security numbers instead of military service numbers to identify Armed Forces personnel.
- 1972 - SSA is required by law to issue Social Security numbers to any legally admitted alien upon entry, and to obtain evidence of age and citizenship or alien status and identity.
- 1972 - SSA begins assigning Social Security numbers and issuing cards centrally from Baltimore, and the area number assigned is based on the mailing address zip code from the application.
- 1989 - SSA program enables parents to automatically obtain a Social Security number for a newborn infant when the birth is registered with the state.

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The SSDI is an index to information about persons with Social Security numbers whose deaths have been reported to the Social Security Administration. The death may have been reported by a survivor requesting benefits. It may have been reported in order to stop Social Security Benefits to the deceased. Funeral homes often report deaths to the SSA as a service to family members.

Beginning in 1962, the SSA began to use a computer database for processing requests for benefits. About 98% percent of the people in the SSDI died after 1962, but a few death dates go back as far as 1937.

Because legal Aliens in the U.S. can obtain a Social Security card, their names may appear in the SSDI if their deaths were reported. Some 400,000 railroad retirees are also included in the SSDI.

The Social Security Death Index is not an index to all deceased individuals who have held Social Security Numbers. It is not a database of all deceased individuals who have received Social Security Benefits, or whose families have received survivor benefits.

If you are pretty sure the individual you are looking meets the criteria for inclusion in the SSDI but does not appear in the index, there are some things you might try:

- If searching by name, try searching by possible alternate name spellings.
- If searching by birth or death dates, change them around (i.e. instead of searching for 5 Oct 1958 [10/5/58], search for 10 May 1958 [5/10/58])
Change years around (i.e. 1974 becomes 1947).
- Use all other possible spellings of the name (and perhaps some that aren't so likely). When searching for a name like O'Reilly, or other names with punctuation in them, try the name without the punctuation (e.g. OReilly).
- If you are looking for someone using first and last name but can't find them try searching with first initial and last name.
- There are also rare instances of what appear to be middle initials included with the last name, so you may want to try that as well.
- We also recommend switching the last name and first name around.
- Or, try searching for a middle name as a first name.
- Even if you know a piece of information, try omitting it (i.e. if you know first and last name and death date, try leaving off the first name).

If none of these suggestions work, it is possible that the SSDI has erroneously omitted your subject. If this is the case, you can contact the SSA to correct it.

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