



AMERICAN SOCIETY OF --- NOTARIES

Substitute for Social Security Numbers

Identity theft is a hot topic these days. States are improving the security of their driver's licenses and passing legislation doing away with the use of the social security number on forms (see this issue's Legislative Update).

Notary witness-only loan closers are still, however, being asked by some lenders and signing services for their social security numbers. This makes the person's social security number available to anyone working for that lender or signing service, which is clearly at odds with today's heightened concerns over personal identity security.

The good news is that sole proprietors, such as witness-only loan closers may easily obtain an Employer Identification Number (EIN). This number may be given to employers in the place of a social security number for purposes of processing 1099 forms.

You can obtain an EIN over the phone immediately. The Internal Revenue Service maintains a toll-free number, **1-800-829-4933**, which is available five days a week, 7:00 am – 10pm, Monday through Friday. Whoever makes the call must be authorized to receive the EIN. It will be helpful to complete the SS-4 form, Application for Employment Identification Number, before calling and have it handy.

The form for obtaining the EIN, SS-4, is available online. Go to www.irs.gov. Use the search feature on the irs.gov homepage. There are two boxes in the upper left-hand corner of the homepage. Leave the "within:" box on "IRS Site." Enter "Form SS-4 Internet-EIN" into the box marked "Search for..." The first hit should be the Online Application Form SS-4. Actually, you have to scroll down to "APPLY ONLINE NOW" in blue letters. Clicking on those words will bring up the form. You may fill out the form on your computer and apply over the internet. Ironically, the IRS asks for your social security number on the form. The IRS will want to match any 1099 forms that they receive with your EIN on them with your social security number on your tax return. They also advise that the EIN is for business use only and should not be used in place of your social security number for other valid non-business purposes.

While other reasons may exist for an employer to ask a sole proprietor for his/her Social Security number, those who want the information for 1099 reporting purposes will be equally served by your EIN. It makes good sense for any sole proprietor notary to obtain one. •