

## The Master Address File for the 2010 Census

Key Housing Issues for Local Governments That Affect the  
Accuracy of the Census Enumeration



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**JOSEPH SALVO**  
**POPULATION DIVISION**

### In Simplest Terms, the Steps in the Census:

- ✓ Create a list of addresses
  
- ✓ Mail questionnaires to those addresses with  
a request that respondents mail back their  
questionnaires
  
- ✓ Follow-up on all households that do not  
respond

## Some Facts About the Census Enumeration

- First and foremost, it relies on the mailout-mailback method, the foundation of which is the list of addresses
- For most households in the nation, the Census relies on exact addresses: number, street and apartment number (city-style addresses)
- Each exact address is a record on the Census Bureau's Master Address File

## Major Issue

The mailout-mailback method takes care of most households in the nation

**BUT**

There is a sizable and growing number of housing units within small, medium, and large communities all over the country, for which this method is insufficient

## A Solution is At Hand

- To their credit, the Census Bureau has acknowledged the problem and is devising a set of procedures to make the census more accurate
- Right now, the Bureau is at a critical juncture, where they need to move from testing to implementation, making the issues of timing and budget of great importance

## A Few Details

## The Problem with Some Housing Addresses

- ✓ A significant number of housing units do not have numbers for individual apartments
- ✓ This is most common in small multi-unit buildings where apartment numbers are not used for mail delivery
- ✓ As the Census Bureau acknowledges, this is not just a big city issue
- ✓ Mailing census forms without accurate exact addresses makes the enumeration inaccurate

## How Pervasive?

- Communities with an abundance of small multi-unit buildings, typically with two to six housing units, where the costs of housing have risen and where large numbers of immigrants are present
- With their larger families, it is tempting to characterize this as an immigrant issue. While it is certainly true that immigrant communities have more of this problem, it is not confined to these places
- This problem has actually been around for several decades but it received increased attention because of the difficulties in identifying duplicate addresses in Census 2000

## How is Accuracy Compromised?

1. Confuses those who are trying to create the Master Address File because they cannot make accurate distinctions between apartments
2. Cannot mail forms to these apartments with any confidence that they will reach the occupants
3. Cannot follow-up on them in an accurate fashion because of confusion over where the apartment is located



## How is Accuracy Compromised?

4. Confuses those who are trying to sort out what households were and were not enumerated for the purposes of evaluating the accuracy of the census
5. This problem is not confined to illegal housing – it affects many types of small multi-unit buildings, legal and illegal
6. It is becoming more pervasive, with the increased flow of immigrants and because of the increased cost of housing in many of the nation's cities



## What to Do?

### Improve the Listing and Identification of Addresses

- Those who list addresses and those who conduct in-person enumeration need to be free to observe entrances, doorways, doorbells etc. for all of the physical signs of occupancy
- Instructions need to provide address listers with a guide on how to label units that do not have conventional labels
- Encourage local governments to participate in the Local Update of Census Addresses (LUCA) program

## Adopt Alternate Enumeration Methods in Problem Areas

- Use alternate methods that permit face-to-face enumeration in selected areas where mailout-mailback does not work well
- Preferred method is called Update/Enumerate, where a field worker with an address list in hand checks the address, fixes the list when necessary, and then enumerates the household on the spot
- With the advent of the short-form only census, this method becomes a much more feasible option

## Identify Problem Areas

- Target blocks with an abundance of these problems throughout the nation
- Right now, the Census Bureau is developing and testing methods of identifying these blocks using data from the Master Address File and from other sources



## Summary

- Census Bureau has the expertise to deal with this problem in 2010
- Timelines and Budgets need to be in sync so that the Bureau is permitted to follow through and implement these improvements