

PII

Another new Acronym!
What does it stand for?

PII

• PII = Personally
Identifiable
Information

It is any information about an individual maintained by an agency, including, but not limited to financial transactions and any information which can be used to distinguish or trace an individual's identity such as their name, social security number, date and place of birth, mother's maiden name and any other personal information which is linkable to an individual.

Interesting fact...

- 87% of the U.S. population can be uniquely identified with a combination of gender, birth date, and five digit zip code.

So, what's the big deal?

- The Privacy Act of 1974 states that the federal government "...ensures the security and confidentiality of records...which could result in a substantial harm, embarrassment, inconvenience, or unfairness to an individual..."

- We can all agree that this is important. No one wants his/her personal information being released and falling into the hands of someone who might use it in the wrong way.

- We have read in the paper or seen on T.V. cases where many records were lost. This is impacting NRCS and thus you – the SWCDs – as our key partner.

We are directed to protect private and sensitive data. Examples of the two types of data are listed below.

Private Data

- Social Security Number
- Tax ID Number
- Bank Account Numbers
- Farm Numbers
- Tract Numbers

Sensitive Data

- Name
- Address
- Email Address
- Phone Number

The key in many cases is not allowing several of these pieces of data to be released so they can be linked together. Remember – one piece of information may not be damaging by itself, but when you combine it with another piece of information it could be very dangerous.

Some people will say, *“I can get this information from other sources like a plat book, internet sites, or other public entities.”*

This is true but our challenge is to protect the customer’s personal information in the files in the field office.

Fact:

- Our federal case files, such as EQIP contracts, Conservation Plans and CRP plans and revisions contain PII.
- We can’t allow these files to be shared with the public at an SWCD meeting.

- This issue (trying to safeguard PII) may make you think we are pulling away from your responsibility to review and approve conservation plans.
- That is NOT the case! We value your review and input into the conservation plans we develop. We are just working to protect our customer’s information.

What are your responsibilities?

- SWCDs are units of state government and hold public meetings that are subject to the Open Meetings Law.
- Minutes of SWCD meetings are available to the public, and are subject to the “Sunshine Advisories” issued by the Iowa Attorney General’s Office.
- However, PII needs to be protected in both instances.

Possible solutions

- Have the producer sign a release form that allows you to review his/her conservation plan.
- Have the producer come to the meeting and present their plan to you.
- Have an SWCD representative review the plan ahead of the meeting and report to the full board.

AS A LAST RESORT—NOT RECOMMENDED

- The SWCD could go into closed session to review the files. Do so only with proper planning and procedures!!!!

Notification and Authorization to Release Information

For United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

I, _____ (please print full name)
hereby authorize the release of my individual records that are in the custody of the USDA, NRCS, to the following named individual(s) or representative(s) of the following organization(s):

List name(s) or organization(s): _____

This authorization pertains to the following information (initial in block): _____
Any/all information in my files:

—or—
Only the following information listed below (include dates):

I understand and acknowledge that NRCS cannot be responsible for ensuring the confidentiality of released records.

Current Address: _____

Social Security Number (Last four numbers only): XXXX-XX-____

Signature: _____

Date signed: _____

Date this release expires: _____

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SWCD Minutes

- It is still important to document the actions taken by the board. The key is not to include PII
- **Don'ts:** Conservation Plan Approvals
John Smith, HEL, Tract 0000, Sect. 6 T40NR10E
Susie Johnson, CRP, Tract XXXX, Sect. 36 T41NR9E
- **Do's:** Conservation Plan Approvals
John Smith
Susie Johnson

Remember, this is about protecting OUR customers' records and information

It is not about lessening your input into local resource concerns and our planning process to solve them.

Our conservation partnership is a strong one. Together we can accomplish both objectives:

- Protect our customers' information
- Get your input in the conservation planning process.

QUESTIONS?