Report In Brief

U.S. Department of Commerce, Office of Inspector General
November 2009

Why We Did This Review

The Federal Information Security Management Act of 2002 (FISMA) requires federal agencies to identify and provide security protection of information collected or maintained by it or on its behalf. Inspectors general are required to annually evaluate agencies' information security programs and practices. Such evaluations must include testing of a representative subset of systems and an assessment, based on that testing, of the entity's compliance with FISMA and applicable requirements.

This review covers our evaluation of the Census Bureau's FDCA system, which is one of a sample of systems we assesed in FY 2009.

Background

FDCA is a contractor-designed system used by Census field workers to collect, process, and secure information for the decennial census. The FDCA system provides essential IT support for census field operations.

C&A is a process by which security controls for IT systems are assessed to determine their overall effectiveness. Understanding the remaining vulnerabilities identified during the assessment is essential in determining the risk to the organization's operations and assets, to individuals, to other organizations, and to the nation resulting from the use of the system.

U.S. Census Bureau

FY 2009 FISMA Assessment of the Field Data Collection Automation System (OAE-19728)

What We Found

We evaluated certification and accreditation activities for the Field Data Collection Automation (FDCA) system as part of our FY 2009 reporting responsibilities under the Federal Information Security Management Act (FISMA).

On April 17, 2009, FDCA was granted an interim authorization to operate, allowing the system to operate under specific terms and conditions while vulnerabilities were assessed and corrected. On June 17, 2009, the authorizing official granted full operation of FDCA, even though at the time Census had made only minimal progress in correcting system weaknesses. We found that the authorizing official should have extended the interim authorization to operate rather than issuing a full authorization.

Our review also found that FDCA's system security plans and security control assessments were generally adequate, but need improvement. The bureau has not established, implemented, and assessed secure configuration settings for all IT products that are part of FDCA.

What We Recommend

We recognize the need for FDCA to continue to operate and provide support to decennial census operations, so our recommendations are intended to provide increased assurance that the system and its information will be adequately protected for the duration of the decennial census.

Census agreed with our findings and all but one of our recommendations. It partially concurred with this recommendation and described a reasonable and responsive alternative corrective action.