

Security of the Social Security Administration's Wireless Networks

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Office of Audit Report Summary

Objective

To determine whether the Social Security Administration's (SSA) wireless networks and attached devices were (1) authorized and (2) reasonably secure in accordance with Federal laws, regulations, guidelines, and standards as well as with Agency policy and procedures. As part of SSA's Fiscal Year 2013 Financial Statement Audit, we contracted with Grant Thornton LLP (GT) to perform additional wireless testing. GT expanded its wireless testing to include wireless network mapping, a vulnerability assessment, and penetration testing to meet the objectives of this review and inform its Financial Statement Audit internal control opinion.

Background

According to the National Institute of Standards and Technology, a wireless local area network (wireless network) is a group of devices within a limited geographic area, such as an office building, that exchanges data through radio communications. Wireless networks are typically less secure than their wired counterparts for several reasons, including the ease of access to the network and often weak security configurations.

Our Findings

Based on GT's wireless network security testing, we and GT determined that (1) not all of SSA's off-net wireless networks were authorized and approved before operation, and (2) with a few exceptions, the Agency's wireless networks were reasonably secure in accordance with Federal laws, regulations, guidelines, and standards as well as Agency policy and procedures. GT did not identify any high-risk security issues that it succeeded in exploiting within the timeframe allotted for testing.

Our Recommendations

Based on GT's assessment, we and GT made several recommendations, which we discussed with responsible SSA officials.

SSA agreed with our recommendations.