

Office of Workers' Compensation Programs (OWCP)

Q&As – Case ID and CMR

BACKGROUND: On October 07, 2014, the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs (OWCP), Division of Coal Mine Workers' Compensation (DCMWC), notified stakeholders of a new Case ID numbering system and asked them to mail all incoming correspondence to a Central Mailroom (CMR).

Below are some questions and answers about the new Case ID system and CMR:

1. QUESTION: Why is the Black Lung Program changing the claim number from the coal miner's Social Security Number (SSN) to the new Case ID?

ANSWER: Primarily to protect the miner's privacy. For several years, the Program has been using the miner's or survivor's name, a portion of the miner's SSN, and a suffix to differentiate types of claims. This system has become obsolete, so we have initiated the new Case ID numbering system.

2. QUESTION: That can't be the only reason for making people use a new number.

ANSWER: The secondary reason was that we have begun to collect mail in a central location instead of in eight different offices and, to make sure that every document is identified properly and gets into the right claimant's folder, the new system has assigned a Case ID for each individual claim.

3. QUESTION: If a miner has filed more than one claim, how will this new Case ID help tell them apart?

ANSWER: Only one claim can be active at any given time, and Case ID numbers will be assigned to active claims. When the current claim is closed, and the miner files a new claim, a new Case ID will be assigned. A Case ID will be assigned to every claim from now on, whether it is filed by a miner, a surviving spouse, or a surviving child.

4. QUESTION: So why do you still need the miner's Social Security Number?

ANSWER: Although we will not be using the SSN as a claim number, it still identifies each individual. The Department of Labor uses it internally for accounting purposes, and the Social Security Administration requires it when we ask them for earnings records to help the miner prove which coal mine operator s/he worked for.

5. QUESTION: If the miner's Black Lung claims office is in Colorado or Pennsylvania, won't sending mail to London, Kentucky slow things down?

ANSWER: Actually, we have found that using a central mailroom not only speeds up the claims process, but saves the government and taxpayers quite a bit of money. The documents received in London are scanned in a high-speed, high-resolution scanner and are sorted by Case ID. Documents without the Case ID are searched for identifying information (name, address, SSN, etc.), and then matched up with the Case ID. The scanned documents are then stored in an electronic case folder which is made available to the claims examiner and other District Office staff on the following day. There is no need to waste time by making sure that paper documents are properly filed in a paper folder.

6. QUESTION: What happens to the paper?

ANSWER: Paper documents are saved for 21 days to ensure that they have been scanned and identified properly. Quality control of the scanning is done at the mailroom in London, and each document is checked by claims staff in the District Office. After 21 days, the original documents are destroyed.

7. QUESTION: What about important or irreplaceable originals, like wedding and birth certificates?

ANSWER: We encourage people to submit *certified copies* of originals, not the originals themselves. However, sometimes the original is all that is available. These valuable items should be sent to the District Office that services the claim, where they will be copied and returned. As a precaution, Central Mailroom staff have been trained to recognize valuable originals and have 21 days to retrieve them after scanning, but sending them to the District Office is the safer choice.

8. QUESTION: What about x-ray films, DVDs of medical records, and other non-paper items?

ANSWER: These should be sent to the Central Mailroom. They will be forwarded to the District Offices after any accompanying documents are scanned and added to the electronic folder. A good example is the package of medical results and reports that a doctor submits after examining a miner in connection with his claim. The paper reports and the doctor's bill will be scanned, and the x-ray film or DVD will be sent to the District Office.

9. QUESTION: What about medical bills? Are those sent to central mailroom?

ANSWER: Treatment bills should continue to be sent to the medical billing contractor using P.O. Box 8202, and all other mail is sent to the Central Mailroom using the P.O. Box 8307 address.

10. QUESTION: This sounds really new, and complicated.

ANSWER: It is new for the Federal Black Lung Program, but similar systems have been in place in other worker's compensation programs for a long time. The savings for everyone in time, money, and paper will be substantial.

11. QUESTION: How do I get a copy of the file, or anything inside it that I need?

ANSWER: If you are entitled to see the file, because you are the claimant or a party to the claim, or because you are the miner's treating physician and she/he has asked that you be sent a copy of the medical reports, copies will be printed either on paper or onto digital media and sent to you as they are now.

12. QUESTION: What's the downside? What can go wrong?

ANSWER: In the beginning, there may be a few problems of document recognition and filing. However, the Program has been successfully using a similar system for medical bills for ten years, we have been testing this system for months, and the other workers' compensation programs in the Department of Labor are using it already. We think that the bugs have already been worked out. We are committed to making this change work for everyone, including beneficiaries and claimants, the coal companies, and the doctors and lawyers who deal with the claims, so we will be monitoring the process at the Central Mailroom and in the District Offices to make sure that it is successful.

All claim forms and pertinent documentation should now be submitted to our Central Mailroom address listed below:

**U.S. Department of Labor
OWCP/DCMWC/CMR Correspondence
P.O. Box 8307
London, KY 40742-8307**