

# 1990 Census — The Big Count

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By Kathryn Lizik

Once every 10 years every man, woman, and child is counted in the nation's decennial census. It is one of the federal government's largest undertakings, short of mobilizing for war. The next census is scheduled for April 1, 1990. The U.S. Census Bureau will hire an "army" of 300,000 census-takers; check the location of the nation's 106 million housing units; and help gather vital information about 250 million people. The census results will be a snapshot of what the country looks like on census day, and they will be used to plan government policies for the next decade.

The mandate for the census is found in Article 1, Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution. Its primary purpose is to determine how many congressional representatives each state gets. The importance of the census has increased, however, for reasons beyond congressional representation. More than \$30 billion in federal funds is allocated to the states according to formulas based on census data. State governments use the figures to allocate their financial resources and redraw legislative districts. Governments of all types use census information extensively

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ALASKANS COUNT

to plan for and locate new roads, schools, hospitals, housing projects and crime prevention programs. Businesses use the information for similar reasons, such as deciding where to put shopping centers or how to target advertising campaigns.

With so much riding on the outcome of the count, it's no wonder the total cost of planning, carrying out and providing the results of the census will be about \$2.6 billion. More than \$1.6 billion will be spent in 1990 alone to cover the costs of printing, labeling and assembling some 106 million questionnaire packages; generating over 7 million maps; and paying for the 300,000+ temporary workers which will be employed during the peak census-taking month of April.

### **First Results are Due to the President in December 1990**

It is estimated that there are 20% more housing units to check and 25 million more people to count during the 1990 census than there were in 1980. Despite this increase, the Census Bureau must adhere to its decennial schedule. Nine months after the first questionnaires are received, apportionment counts must be delivered to the President (December 31, 1990). It is mandated that the States must receive their redistricting counts no later than April 1, 1991. The remaining volumes of social and economic data will gradually become available to the public beginning in early summer 1991.

The success of the census is not, however, entirely based on how much money the Census Bureau spends, nor how expeditious their enumeration schedule is. One of the primary ingredients guaranteeing its accuracy is a full response to the questionnaire by every household. One way of boosting response is making individuals aware that the census is coming, including how and when it will be happening in their area.

### **Rural Alaska: House-to-House Count Begins February 1990**

Due to Alaska's uniqueness in geography and weather, the census is beginning earlier in all of its outlying areas. The enumeration process will be

slightly different than in the urban areas. Beginning in early February, census-takers will walk the streets and trails of rural Alaska, contacting every housing unit to collect answers to the census questionnaire. This early operation has been arranged to avoid breakup and to catch those populations who seasonally migrate for hunting and fishing purposes.

### **Anchorage & Fairbanks: A Mail Out/Mail Back Questionnaire**

In the Municipality of Anchorage and the City of Fairbanks, the most automated enumeration will be conducted, defined as mail-out/mail-back. Questionnaires, pre-addressed with the housing unit's actual street number will be delivered to each structure one week prior to census day, by the postal service. Respondents will be instructed to fill out the form and mail it back to the Census Bureau.

### **Remaining Urban Alaska - A Mail Out/Pick Up Questionnaire**

Many of the remaining urban areas will participate in the census operation referred to as regular list enumerate. These households will have a questionnaire delivered to them via mail about a week before April 1, 1990. They will be instructed to fill out the form and wait for a census taker to contact them at their home for pick up of the questionnaire.

In all cases, census takers will be following up all unreturned forms by physically visiting any missed or nonresponse housing units.

In summary, active involvement by all Alaskans to stand up and be counted will ensure accurate and credible data for redistricting, federal and state dollar redistribution, and for the business community to make informed decisions on investing in the future of our state.

## **How's The Census Being Done In Your Area?**

### **Mailout/Mailback**

Anchorage Borough  
City of Fairbanks

### **Mailout/Pickup**

City of Cordova & vicinity  
City of Haines & vicinity  
Juneau Borough  
Kenai Borough  
City of Ketchikan & vicinity  
Mat-Su Borough  
Balance of North Star  
Borough  
City of Petersburg & vicinity  
Sitka Borough  
City of Skagway & vicinity  
City of Valdez & vicinity  
City of Wrangell & vicinity

### **Remote List Enumerate**

Rest of Alaska

### *About the author:*

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