

Snowbirds and the Census

Every resident of the United States should be counted by the Census ONCE, and IN THE RIGHT PLACE.

Most of Michigan's snowbirds—people who spend the summer months in a northern state and the winter months in a southern state—should:

- Enter a zero for the number of people living at their Sunbelt address.
- Leave the rest of their Sunbelt census form blank.
- Wait until they get back to their usual residence in Michigan to fill out the census form that was delivered there.

Why does it matter for Snowbirds to be counted in the right place?

Counting snowbirds in the wrong place reduces Michigan's political influence in Congress, reduces the level of federal funding received by state and local agencies, and reduces the accuracy of census data.

- If Michigan's snowbirds had been counted in the right place, Michigan would not have lost a congressional seat after the 2000 Census.
- Michigan should not lose another congressional seat after the 2010 Census if its snowbirds are counted in the right place.
- Approximately \$200 million dollars of federal funds that should be spent in Michigan each year are spent elsewhere instead because too many Michigan snowbirds were counted in the Sunbelt by the 2000 Census. That adds up to \$2 billion dollars over the course of a decade, and it is one of the reasons why the Federal government spends less money in Michigan than Michigan residents pay in taxes.
- There is a small bias in the population figures used to compute health statistics, economic statistics, and social indicators because many snowbirds tend to be counted in the wrong place.

Where should snowbirds be counted?

The [official residence rules for the census](#) state that **“snowbirds” should be “counted at the residence where they live most of the year.”** For example, people who spend seven months in Michigan and five months in Florida should be counted only in Michigan, even if they are in Florida on census day.

The [Census 2010 Reference Book](#) states further that **people with more than one residence should be counted where they spend “more time than any other place they might live or stay.”** Thus, people should be counted in Michigan if they spend three months in Aruba, four months in Florida, and five months in Michigan. People who spend the largest part of the year in Florida, on the other hand, should be counted in Florida.

How can a snowbird avoid being counted in the wrong place?

Census forms do not ask where you live. That information comes from the bar code on the address label. Thus, you will be counted in the Sunbelt if you complete the census form that you receive at your Sunbelt address.

If no one spends the largest part of the year at your Sunbelt residence, you should:

- **ENTER A ZERO FOR THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE LIVING THERE ON CENSUS DAY.**
- **LEAVE THE REST OF THE FORM BLANK**, except for writing **“USUAL RESIDENCE ELSEWHERE”** so that the person who enters your data will know why you entered a zero.

Many snowbirds will probably answer the census incorrectly because the questionnaire simply asks for the number of people “living or staying in this house, apartment, or mobile home on April 1, 2010.” Unless they are experts on census terminology, they may not realize that “living” at a certain place means “having it as your usual residence,” and “staying” at a certain place means “staying there while having no usual residence elsewhere.”

The census form does not provide adequate instructions for people with multiple residences, so they will have to remember on their own to enter a zero for the number of people living at the address where they spend a smaller portion of the year.

What does it take for a snowbird to be counted in the right place?

It is easier to be counted in the right place than it is to avoid being counted in the wrong place.

- If someone else is staying at your usual residence when census forms are delivered, you should contact them to make sure they include you when they fill out their form.

- If no one is at your usual residence when census forms are delivered, then wait until you return home and fill out the census form that should be waiting for you there.

If you do not find a census form when you get home, then you can simply wait for a census worker to come to your door. Census workers make multiple attempts to contact people who are not at home, so you should not have to worry about being left out of the census.

(An alternative to waiting for a census worker is to fill out a “Be Counted” form from your local library or another location that will be announced in the Spring of 2010. These are special census forms for people who do not have a regular form or whose regular form was filled out incorrectly.)

IF YOU LIVE IN MICHIGAN, BE COUNTED IN MICHIGAN !