

## Masking Social Security Numbers in an Excel Worksheet

Many of the Excel worksheets that we use contain social security numbers and there may be times when you want to "mask" a portion of the number so that only the last 4 digits of the social security number display. Excel offers two ways that you can do this.

The first method masks the first 5 digits of the social security number with asterisks; the second method displays only the last 4 digits of the social security number.

### Masking the Social Security Number

The first thing you need to do is insert a column next to the column of social security numbers. This new column will contain the masked numbers.

From the Main Menu, click on Insert > Columns. The column is inserted. Select the column you just inserted and then select Format > Cells > Number.

Then click OK.

You will use the CONCATENATE function to create the masked social security numbers. In cell B1, type the formula below and press Enter:

```
=CONCATENATE("***-**-",RIGHT(A1,4))
```

Drag the autofill square to copy the formula to the remaining cells.

Then, hide or delete the column that contains the actual social security numbers.

- **To hide the column**, select the column that contains the actual social security numbers and then select Format, Column, Hide from the Excel menu. This will hide the column and it can be "unhidden" as needed.
- **A more permanent solution is to delete the column.** But...if you delete the column at this point, the CONCATENATE function will no longer work, because you will have deleted the function's references. So prior to deleting the columns, you must insert a column next to the column that contains the actual social security numbers. Once the column is created, select the data in column C (the masked social security numbers) and select Edit, Copy from the Excel menu. Click in cell B1 and select Edit, **Paste Special**, from the Excel menu. **In the Paste Special box, select Values and click OK.** Press ESC to end the copy operation. Once the data is copied, you can delete the column that contains the original social security numbers and the column that contains the original concatenated data.

### Displaying only the last 4 digits of the social security number

Follow all of the instructions under "Masking the Social Security Number", except enter this formula in cell B1 and drag it to the rest of the column:

```
=RIGHT(A1,4)
```

All that is left is for you to hide or delete the column that contains the actual social security numbers.