

For individuals who go south for the winter, the 2010 census form does not offer clear instructions on how best to fill it out. Snowbirds will receive pre-addressed questionnaires at both their winter residences and their temporarily unoccupied northern homes in March. The U.S. Postal Service will not forward census forms, so many people are likely to fill out the questionnaire they receive at their winter home. In the past there have been ways they could indicate that their primary residence is in Wisconsin.

For 2010, **Question 10** asks if a person sometimes lives elsewhere and, if so, “at a seasonal or second residence.” Even if respondents indicate a second residence, they will be counted in the southern state’s population. Meanwhile, census takers will visit their unresponsive northern homes in May and June, when most snowbirds have returned home. If the dual homeowner tells the enumerator they completed a census form while living in their southern home, they will not be counted up North, even if they live there most of the time.

To make it come out right, respondents should not complete the southern questionnaires. They should write ‘zero’ for the number of April 1 residents, put “usual residence elsewhere” somewhere on the form, and mail it back. Then they should fill out the northern address questionnaire or respond to a 2010 census taker during door-to-door canvassing. Further, they have to say that they “lived” at the northern address on April 1 – after all, they actually did, but were just away on extended vacation.

Northern states are at real risk of losing population that rightfully belongs to them, along with seats in Congress and federal funds, especially for programs that help seniors. It’s too late to fix this flaw in the system now, so it is critical to educate snowbirds.