

Criminal Research Procedures

Why physical searches of county records are best – and how to get the best results

Even with all of today's high tech alternatives, a physical search of county court records still is your best choice for accurate criminal background checks. Approximately 95 percent of all felonies and misdemeanors are tried at the county level, and county records are updated immediately as a case proceeds through the system towards a final disposition.

Although county criminal checks are the most accurate, there are some key precautions you need to be aware of to make sure you get the best results:

How to get your best results from a county check

- The most important information needed, in order of importance, includes: name, date of birth and Social Security Number.
- Since the vast majority of county searches start with a person's name, it is critical to have the applicant's name spelled correctly.
- The date of birth is then the first qualifier for a records check – and according to the EEOC's Title VII requirements, it is perfectly legal to ask a job applicant for a date of birth for purposes of obtaining a background check.
- Social Security Numbers are not as important as you would think, because many counties don't record them. And privacy cases now in court may take Social Security Numbers completely out of criminal files in the future.

Don't be deceived by inaccurate, outdated database searches for criminal background checks

- *There is no national criminal check available!* The FBI has a private access, national criminal check database but even that is considered only 40 percent accurate, at best.
- Statewide checks are not available in every state – and timeliness and accuracy are always issues for the states that offer such information.
- Even after repeated attempts to compile information from counties, our research shows these state-level databases are not as up to date or complete as the country repository.
- There are no consistent county reporting procedures – and many counties don't regularly report updates to state databases.
- Many counties still use non-computerized methods to store records and these never get to a database.

As part of our commitment to advanced technological solutions, Selection.com will continue to investigate all criminal research alternatives. But our responsibility is to provide you with accurate, complete information – and a physical search of county court records is the best way to accomplish that goal for you. By following a few simple precautions when you enter information about a job applicant, you can be assured that you will receive the best available results.