

Federal Information Processing Standards (FIPS) 55 CHANGE NOTICE **Effective January 1, 2006**

The National Institute of Standards and Technology withdrew Federal Information Processing Standards (FIPS) 55 as part of an announcement in the Federal Register on February 8, 2005 (70 FR 6623). As a result, the existing FIPS 55 guideline is being redesigned with significant changes. The FIPS 55 five-digit code, which was based upon an alphanumeric sequential sorting scheme unique within State, occasionally required changing codes to maintain the sort. A new standard is being developed, which will also seek acceptance and approval by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) as an ANSI standard. The new proposed standard will use the feature identifier (ID) code from the Geographic Names Information System (GNIS), which will never change. This ID consists of a nationally assigned numeric value of up to eight digits.

The GNIS is the nation's official geographic names repository database and has been designated by the U.S. Board on Geographic Names (q.v.) as the only source of geographic names and locative attributes for use by the agencies of the Federal Government and their contractors. Therefore, Federal agencies and their contractors already use the GNIS and its feature IDs directly as required by law. Furthermore, this feature identifier is the one being used as the only official entity identifier for geographic names, and as such is being incorporated into the files and databases of the GNIS partners at the local, tribal, and State level. The FIPS 55 is now a part of the GNIS. Selected entity attributes specifically related to FIPS 55 also are included or will become part of the GNIS. Over the next several months, these attributes will be analyzed, and it will be determined which attributes should be retained or eliminated. Some attributes will be retained such as the class code indicators of whether a place is incorporated or not. We welcome suggestions and recommendations regarding requirements from users. Certain attributes that are internal to other agencies and probably were not appropriate as FIPS 55 attributes will be eliminated or maintained in GNIS directly by those agencies, such as Government Services Administration (GSA) Geographic Locator Codes, Census Bureau Master Reference File Codes, and U.S. Postal Service ZIP[®] Codes. Please be assured that most attributes from the FIPS 55 will be preserved in some form that will be available so that there is no loss of functionality to the user community. It also is important to make clear a national standard coding scheme will continue to exist. The name and authority of the coding scheme might change, but the concept, that is, purpose of FIPS 55 will exist as a new standard with the data stored in the GNIS database.

The GNIS ID preserves the specific identification of a FIPS 55 entity, makes it nationally unique, assures that the identifier will never change, and provides a mechanism for preservation (and enhancement) of most of the attributes long associated with FIPS 55. The intent is to add to the GNIS additional Feature Types to accommodate the FIPS 55 class codes, and potentially add a field to store the Part Of information now only contained in the FIPS 55 data. All other fields of FIPS 55 planned for maintenance already are included in the GNIS.

The former FIPS 55 standard 5-digit codes will still be assigned by the GNIS Manager of the U.S. Geological Survey, as needed, until December 31, 2005, after which no more such codes will be assigned. As of January 1, 2006 the GNIS ID and its associated fixed-length representation will become the official standard code. Please let us know if there are questions, and we encourage users to comment regarding specific concerns.

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