With Google, Bing, and Yahoo search engines offering an abundance of information, it has become increasingly difficult for shelter locations to remain confidential. A simple Google search for “domestic violence shelter + city” may reveal a listing of a confidential shelter address along with a map to pinpoint the location. While this may make programs more accessible for victims seeking help, some programs are worried that abusers may come looking for survivors living in confidential shelters. Programs can request that their confidential shelter address be removed, but it is also imperative that programs understand how their shelter location information gets shared, how to lessen risk of shelter disclosure, and the different ways to get the shelter location off of the internet.

**How Does Your Information Get Online?**

Although shelters that have confidential locations are vigilant about not sharing their location with anyone, the reality is that location information is shared regardless. The location is shared with the police, maintenance and utility companies, cab drivers who bring survivors into shelters, and the survivors themselves. Companies such as the post office, delivery companies, or utility companies may share or sell address information with others companies, advertisers, or information brokers. It’s important to know the privacy policy of those companies and learn with whom they may share your location.

Once your location gets sold or is given away, it can be used to inform local business listing services (such as YP/Yellowpages, DexKnows, Superpages, etc.) This information, in turn, is used by online business listings and mapping services (such as Google Places, Bing Local) to tell their users where a business is located. Online business listing services get their sources from a variety of places:

- Local business listing services such as Localeze, Acxiom, Infogroup, Citysearch, Superpages, Yellowpages and more.
- Other online location “crowdsourcing” such as Yelp and even Facebook Pages.
- People who use the online maps and directories can manually update the listing by correcting listings, update information, and even provide a review of the “business.”

Confidential shelter addresses can also be revealed online through websites that share directory information for local social services or other service providers’ websites that list resources available for clients.

**How to Lessen the Risk of Shelter Location Disclosure**

To ensure that your confidential location stays confidential, share that address with as few people as possible. Preventing your location information from being shared is a lot easier to manage than getting removing the information once it’s online.

- Use a P.O. Box or administrative office address to receive mail and delivery.
- Reduce the number of businesses and people that know your shelter location.
- Don’t forget that putting your shelter location in an email may reveal your confidential location to more than just the person you’re emailing. Not only is email not a confidential form of communication, but that email could be forwarded or accidentally sent to the wrong people.
- Have clear policies and procedures on how and when your shelter location is shared with others in the community and ensure that all staff, volunteers, and board members are trained. Make note of the mail that comes to your agency. Junk mail is usually a sign that your confidential location might be in a database somewhere. (You can opt out of receiving junk mail by going here: www.dmachoice.org.)
Confidential Shelter Locations & The Internet: How Information Gets Online & What To Do About It

How to Get Your Shelter Location Off the Internet
Once your information is online, you can request that the online listing services remove your confidential location. Your confidential shelter location is considered a business. Each search engine has its own process for requesting a deletion. In general, you can “claim” your business and then request that it be removed or deleted.

Know the difference between a search result and a search engine business listing (Google Places or Bing Local). For example, if you put your shelter name in the Google search engine, and you see links that take you to a website that has your confidential shelter location—you need to contact the website owner to remove your confidential address. However, if it comes up in Google Places (along with a Google Map) then you can request that Google remove the listing.

Below are the steps to request a removal for a few of the major online business listings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Google Places</td>
<td>To edit and remove your listing from Google Places, you will first need to sign into your Google account. Click the marker of your business and to the left of the page there will be an option to “Suggest an edit.” A new window will appear that says “Report a Data Problem” and right below that is the option, “Place is permanently closed or doesn’t exist.” Click the “No” button and the option will automatically switch to “Yes.” It will give you a list of options for the business. Select the option “Private.” According to their site, Google will email you about the status of your changes and may forward you questions from users who review your edits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bing Local</td>
<td>To edit or remove your listing from Bing Local, you will need to “claim” the listing and then edit it. You can claim it by logging into Bing Places: <a href="https://www.bingplaces.com">https://www.bingplaces.com</a>. It takes 4-5 business days for edits or deletions to process. Once a business is tagged “Suppressed” or “Deleted” it should not be repopulated in their listings. However, if a user manually adds the business back, then it’ll go through their verification and validation system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yahoo Local</td>
<td>You can request a listing removal by using this form: <a href="http://help.yahoo.com/l/us/yahoo/local/personal_info.html">http://help.yahoo.com/l/us/yahoo/local/personal_info.html</a>. There are two options on this site: “Cancel a listing you created or claimed” or “Cancel a listing you didn’t create or claim.” Follow the instructions on the option that is applicable to get your address removed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MapQuest</td>
<td>You can contact them using this form: <a href="http://help.mapquest.com/contact-us/">http://help.mapquest.com/contact-us/</a>. Their website will have a dropdown menu asking you to “Select an issue.” Click on “Business Listings on MapQuest.” A form will appear that you can fill out, and at the bottom, you can list a full description of the issue. Click “Report” at the bottom, and the MapQuest team will be in touch with you.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additional Tips
1. Search for your shelter in a variety of ways:
   a. Use different forms of your shelter name or “domestic violence shelter + your city.”
b. Use different search engines. Search engines get their data from a variety of sources, so your confidential shelter may show up on one search engine but not another.

2. Check to see if your confidential shelter location gets relisted, even after you’ve requested its removal. Because these search engines pull their information from somewhere else, whenever that source updates their data, your shelter may be revealed once again.

A Non-Confidential Shelter
In this age of data sharing, keeping a shelter location confidential can be difficult. Many shelters, exhausted with the constant vigilance that is required to ensure that the address remain confidential, have decided that having a public shelter is better for their community. These shelters often have strong policies in place for safety and security, including steel doors, alarm systems, and neighborhood watches. They also have reliable community support and response in case an incident does occur. If staying offline is becoming impossible, this may be an option your program can consider.