



**(U) What Is a FOIA Request? And Why Is S02L3 Always Bugging Us?**

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Intelligence Security Issues (S02L3)  
Run Date: 06/01/2006

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*(U) How NSA handles the many Freedom of Information Act requests it receives every year.*

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(U) It's a dirty job, but someone's got to do it.

(U) By law, any person, including a foreign national, can request access to government records. Signed into law by President Johnson in 1966, the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) attempts to balance the public's interest with the federal government's need to protect vital information. NSA/CSS usually receives over 800 of these requests each year and, with the Agency appearing so frequently in the news, this year so far it has received over 1600 requests.

(U) The types of requests cover a broad range, such as researchers seeking material on current operations or families looking for information about a relative missing in action during the Vietnam era. And, of course, the popular UFO sightings that NSA/CSS is thought to have knowledge about.

(U) FOIA requests are submitted to the Agency through mail, fax, and the Internet. When the request involves SIGINT issues, the Freedom of Information Act/Privacy Act Office (DC34) tasks the Intelligence Securities Issues (S02L3) staff with coordinating the search for information amongst the various SID elements.

(U) In spite of the Agency's backlog of prior FOIA requests, DC34 is required to provide an initial cost estimate back to the requestor within 20 business days. A tasking is sent out, asking the mission element to estimate how long it would take to search and examine official records, including e-mails. Those who request information fall into several categories: the news media, educational and scientific institutions, commercial entities, and "all others," which include the general public. News organizations and academic institutions are exempted from paying search and review fees.

(U) In addition to the disruption to their day-to-day operations, mission elements are naturally reluctant to provide sensitive source material. However, the FOIA Office conducts a thorough line-by-line classification review of all documents and works closely with the subject matter experts to determine whether the information should be released.

(U) So, although offices may never relish answering FOIA requests, at least they can rest assured that no secrets will be divulged! We'll continue to do our best to make the process as painless as possible.

(U) If you have questions about FOIA, please contact [Intelligence Security Issues](#).

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