

## Environmental Protection Agency

## §2.104

record containing information that relates to an investigation of a possible violation of law and was originated by another agency, the receiving office will either direct the FOI Office to refer the request to that other agency or consult with that other agency prior to making any release determination.

### §2.104 Responses to requests and appeals.

(a) Unless the Agency and the requester have agreed otherwise, or when unusual circumstances exist as provided in paragraph (e) of this section, EPA offices will respond to requests no later than 20 working days from the date the request is received and logged in by the appropriate FOI Office. EPA will ordinarily respond to requests in the order in which they were received. If EPA fails to respond to your request within the 20 working day period, or any authorized extension of time, you may seek judicial review to obtain the records without first making an administrative appeal.

(b) On receipt of a request, the FOI Office ordinarily will send a written acknowledgment advising you of the date it was received and of the processing number assigned to the request for future reference.

(c) *Multitrack processing.* The Agency uses three or more processing tracks by distinguishing between simple and complex requests based on the amount of work and/or time needed to process the request, including limits based on the number of pages involved. The Agency will advise you of the processing track in which your request has been placed and of the limits of the different processing tracks. The Agency may place your request in its slower track(s) while providing you the opportunity to limit the scope of your request in order to qualify for faster processing within the specified limits of the faster track(s). If your request is placed in a slower track, the Agency will contact you either by telephone or by letter, whichever is most efficient in each case.

(d) *Unusual circumstances.* When the statutory time limits for processing a request cannot be met because of "unusual circumstances," as defined in the FOIA, and the time limits are extended

on that basis, you will be notified in writing, as soon as practicable, of the unusual circumstances and of the date by which processing of the request should be completed. When the extension is for more than 10 working days, the Agency will provide you with an opportunity either to modify the request so that it may be processed within the 10 working day time limit extension or to arrange an alternative time period for processing the original or modified request.

(e) *Expedited processing.* (1) Requests or appeals will be taken out of order and given expedited treatment whenever EPA determines that such requests or appeals involve a compelling need, as follows:

(i) Circumstances in which the lack of expedited treatment could reasonably be expected to pose an imminent threat to the life or physical safety of an individual; or

(ii) An urgency to inform the public about an actual or alleged Federal government activity, if the information is requested by a person primarily engaged in disseminating information to the public.

(2) A request for expedited processing must be made at the time of the initial request for records or at the time of appeal.

(3) If you are seeking expedited processing, you must submit a statement, certified to be true and correct to the best of your knowledge and belief, explaining in detail the basis for the request. For example, if you fit within the category described in paragraph (e)(1)(ii) of this section and are not a full-time member of the news media, you must establish that you are a person whose primary professional activity or occupation is information dissemination, although it need not be your sole occupation. If you fit within the category described in paragraph (e)(1)(ii) of this section, you must also establish a particular urgency to inform the public about the government activity involved in the request, beyond the public's right to know about government activity generally.

(4) Within 10 calendar days from the date of your request for expedited processing, the head of the Headquarters FOI Staff or Regional FOI Officer will

decide whether to grant your request and will notify you of the decision. If your request for expedited treatment is granted, the request will be given priority and will be processed as soon as practicable. If your request for expedited processing is denied, any appeal of that decision will be acted on expeditiously.

(f) *Grants of requests.* Once an office makes a determination to grant a request in whole or in part, it will release the records or parts of records to you and notify you of any applicable fee charged under § 2.107. Records released in part will be annotated, whenever technically feasible, with the applicable FOIA exemption(s) at that part of the record from which the exempt information was deleted.

(g) *Adverse determinations of requests.* Once the Agency makes an adverse determination of a request, the requestor will be notified of that determination in writing. An adverse determination consists of a determination to withhold any requested record in whole or in part; a determination that a requested record does not exist or cannot be located; a determination that what has been requested is not a record subject to the FOIA; a determination on any disputed fee matter, including a denial of a request for a fee waiver; or a denial of a request for expedited treatment.

(h) *Initial denials of requests.* The Deputy Administrator, Assistant Administrators, Regional Administrators, the General Counsel, the Inspector General, Associate Administrators, and heads of headquarters staff offices are delegated the authority to issue initial determinations. However, the authority to issue initial denials of requests for existing, located records (other than initial denials based solely on § 2.204(d)(1)) may be redelegated only to persons occupying positions not lower than division director or equivalent. Each letter will include:

(1) The name and title or position of the person responsible for the denial;

(2) A brief statement of the reason(s) for the denial, including an identification of records being withheld (individual, or if a large number of similar records are being denied, by described category), and any FOIA exemption ap-

plied by the office in denying the request;

(3) An estimate of the volume of records or information withheld, in number of pages or in some other reasonable form of estimation. This estimate does not need to be provided if the volume is otherwise indicated through annotated deletions on records disclosed in part, or if providing an estimate would harm an interest protected by an applicable exemption; and

(4) A statement that the denial may be appealed under, and a description of the requirements of, paragraph (j) of this section.

(i) *Denial of fee waiver.* The letter denying a request for a fee waiver or expedited treatment will be signed by the head of the Headquarters FOI Staff or Regional FOI Officers.

(j) *Appeals of adverse determinations.* If you are dissatisfied with any adverse determination of your request by an office, you may appeal that determination to the Headquarters Freedom of Information Staff, Records, Privacy and FOIA Branch, Office of Information Collection, Office of Environmental Information, Environmental Protection Agency, 1200 Pennsylvania Avenue (2822T), NW., Washington, DC 20460; e-mail: [hq.foia@epa.gov](mailto:hq.foia@epa.gov). The appeal must be made in writing, and it must be submitted to the Headquarters FOI Staff no later than 30 calendar days from the date of the letter denying the request. The Agency will not consider appeals received after the 30-day limit. The appeal letter may include as much or as little related information as you wish, as long as it clearly identifies the determination being appealed (including the assigned FOIA request number, if known). For quickest possible handling, the appeal letter and its envelope should be marked "Freedom of Information Act Appeal." Unless the Administrator directs otherwise, the General Counsel or his/her designee will act on behalf of the Administrator on all appeals under this section, except that:

(1) In the case of an adverse initial determination by the General Counsel or his/her designee, the Administrator or his/her designee will act on the appeal;

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(2) The Counsel to the Inspector General will act on any appeal where the Inspector General or his/her designee has made the initial adverse determination; however, if the Counsel to the Inspector General has signed the initial adverse determination, the General Counsel or his/her designee will act on the appeal;

(3) An adverse determination by the Administrator on an initial request will serve as the final action of the Agency; and

(4) If a requester seeks judicial review because the Agency has not responded in a timely manner, any further action on an appeal will take place through the lawsuit.

(k) The decision on your appeal will be made in writing, normally within 20 working days of its receipt by the Headquarters Freedom of Information Staff. A decision affirming an adverse determination in whole or in part will contain a statement of the reason(s) for the decision, including any FOIA exemption(s) applied, and inform you of the FOIA provisions for judicial review of the decision. If the adverse determination is reversed or modified on appeal, you will be notified in a written decision. This written decision will either have the requested information that has been determined on appeal to be releasable attached to it, or your request will be returned to the appropriate office so that it may be reprocessed in accordance with the appeal decision.

(l) If you wish to seek judicial review of any adverse determination, you must first appeal that adverse determination under this section, except when EPA has not responded to your request within the statutory 20 working day time limit. In such cases, you may seek judicial review without making an administrative appeal.

### §2.105 Exemption categories.

(a) The FOIA, 5 U.S.C. 552(b), establishes the following nine categories of information which are exempt from the mandatory disclosure requirements of 5 U.S.C. 552(a):

(1)(i) Specifically authorized under criteria established by an Executive Order to be kept secret in the interest

of national defense or foreign policy; and

(ii) Are in fact properly classified pursuant to such Executive order;

(2) Related solely to the internal personnel rules and practices of an agency;

(3) Specifically exempted from disclosure by statute (other than 5 U.S.C. 552(b)), provided that such statute:

(i) Requires that the matters be withheld from the public in such a manner as to leave no discretion on the issue; or

(ii) Establishes particular criteria for withholding information or refers to particular types of information to be withheld;

(4) Trade secrets and commercial or financial information obtained from a person and privileged or confidential;

(5) Inter-agency or intra-agency memoranda or letters which would not be available by law to a party other than an agency in litigation with the affected agency;

(6) Personnel and medical files and similar files the disclosure of which would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy;

(7) Records or information compiled for law enforcement purposes, but only to the extent that the production of such law enforcement records or information:

(i) Could reasonably be expected to interfere with enforcement proceedings;

(ii) Would deprive a person of a right to a fair trial or an impartial adjudication;

(iii) Could reasonably be expected to constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy;

(iv) Could reasonably be expected to disclose the identity of a confidential source, including a State, local, or foreign agency or authority or any private institution which furnished information on a confidential basis, and, in the case of a record or information compiled by a criminal law enforcement authority in the course of a criminal investigation, or by an agency conducting a lawful national security intelligence investigation, information furnished by a confidential source;