



BACKGROUND OF SELECTIVE SERVICE

The Selective Service System is an independent agency within the Executive Branch of the federal government. The Director of Selective Service is appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate.

The legislation under which this agency operates is the Military Selective Service Act. Under this law, the mission of the Selective Service System is twofold: to deliver untrained manpower to the armed forces in time of emergency in accordance with requirements established by the Department of Defense, and to administer the alternative service program for conscientious objectors.

A system of conscription was used during the Civil War and again during World War I with the draft mechanism in both instances being dissolved at the end of hostilities. In 1940, prior to U.S. entry into World War II, the first peacetime draft in our nation's history was enacted in response to increased world tension and the system was able to fill wartime manpower needs smoothly and rapidly after the attack on Pearl Harbor. At the end of the war the draft law was allowed to expire, but it was reenacted less than two years later to maintain necessary military manpower levels as a result of the Cold War. From 1948 until 1973, during both peacetime and periods of conflict, men were drafted to fill vacancies in the armed forces which could not be filled through voluntary means. Induction authority expired in 1973, but the Selective Service System remained in existence in a "standby" posture to support the all-volunteer force in case an emergency should make it necessary for Congress to authorize a resumption of inductions.

Registration was suspended early in 1975 and the Selective Service System entered into a "deep standby" posture. Beginning in late 1979, a series of "revitalization" efforts were begun in an effort to upgrade the System's capability for rapid mobilization in an emergency, and in the summer of 1980 the registration requirement was resumed. Presently, young men must register within 30 days of their 18th birthday.

The Military Selective Service Act, along with its implementing regulations, provides that the structure of the agency will include a National Headquarters, a State Headquarters in each state, plus one for New York City, one for the District of Columbia, one for Guam, one for Puerto Rico, and one for the Virgin Islands. The Act and regulations also provide for local boards, allocated according to county or corresponding political subdivisions. There is also a provision for Appeal Boards, which cover the same areas served by federal judicial districts plus a National Appeal Board. The Appeal Boards act in cases of persons who do not agree with the decisions of the Local Boards.

The approximately 129 full-time paid employees of the Selective Service System are primarily civilians hired under the rules prescribed by the Officer of Personnel Management (formerly U.S. Civil Service Commission). Reserve forces are composed of approximately 150 National Guard and Reserve officers who are assigned to Selective Service for their monthly drills and two-week active duty training sessions each year. In the event of an emergency, these officers could be called to active duty to augment the full-time staff.

The present structure of the agency consists of the National Headquarters, Data Management Center, and three Region Headquarters. State and local offices were closed in 1976 and would be reactivated only if inductions should be resumed.

In the event of a mobilization, Selective Service Reserve Forces Officers would be called to active duty to establish State Headquarters and Area Offices at predetermined locations, and at the same time the Local and Appeal Boards would be activated. A lottery drawing would be conducted to determine the order in which men would be called, and induction orders would be issued, in lottery number order, by means of the U.S. Postal Service. The first priority group would consist of men in the calendar year of their 20th birthday. Registrants receiving induction orders would either report to the Military Entrance Processing Station for examination and possible immediate induction, or file a claim for postponement, deferment or exemption from military service. Such claims would be considered by the Area Office or the Local Board, depending on the nature of the claim. Agency mobilization plans are designed to meet the needs of the Department of Defense.