

(d) *Denial of request.* The Customs officer who denies a request for records (whether in whole or in part) shall mail written notice of the denial to the requester. The letter of notification shall contain (1) the physical location of the requested records, (2) the applicable exemption(s) and reason for not granting the request, (3) the name and title or position of the Customs officer who denied the request, (4) advice on the right to administrative appeal in accordance with §103.7, and (5) the title and address of the Customs officer who is to decide any appeal.

(e) *Inability to locate records within time limits.* If a requested record cannot be located and evaluated within the initial 10-day period or the extension period allowed under §103.8(a), the Customs officer who is responsible for the initial determination shall continue to search for the records. However, that officer shall also notify the requester of the facts and inform the requester that he or she may consider the notification to be a denial of access within the meaning of paragraph (d) of this section, and provide the requester with the address for the submission of an administrative appeal. The requester may also be invited, in the alternative, to agree to a voluntary extension of time in which to locate and evaluate the records. A voluntary extension of time does not waive a requester's right to appeal any ultimate denial of access or to appeal a failure to locate the records within the voluntary extension period.

[T.D. 81-168, 46 FR 32565, June 24, 1981, as amended by T.D. 96-36, 61 FR 19838, May 3, 1996]

§ 103.7 Administrative appeal of initial determination.

(a) *To whom appeals should be submitted.* A requester may submit an administrative appeal to the FOIA Appeals Officer at Headquarters, within 35 days after the date of notification described in §103.6 or the date of the letter transmitting the last records released, whichever is later. A requester shall mail or personally deliver an appeal to the United States Customs Service, 1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW., Washington, DC 20229.

(b) *Form of appeal.* The Administrative appeal shall:

(1) Be in writing and signed by the requester,

(2) Have conspicuously printed on the face of the envelope the words "Freedom of Information Act Appeal";

(3) Reasonably describe, in accordance with §103.5(e), the records to which the appeal relates;

(4) Set forth the address where the requester desires to be notified of the determination on appeal;

(5) Specify the date of the initial request and the date and control number of the letter denying the initial request; and

(6) Petition the FOIA Appeals Officer at Headquarters, to grant the request for records and state any arguments in support thereof.

(c) *Disposition of appeal.* The Customs officer or employee who receives an appeal shall stamp the date of receipt on the appeal and the stamped date is the date of receipt for purposes of the appeal. FOIA Appeals Officer at Headquarters, shall acknowledge and advise the appellant of the date of receipt and of the date that a response is due under this paragraph. The FOIA Appeals Officer shall affirm the initial denial (in whole or in part) or grant the request for records and notify the appellant of that determination by letter mailed within 20 days (exclusive of Saturdays, Sunday, and legal public holidays) after the date of receipt of the appeal, unless extended pursuant to §103.8(a). The purpose of the letter of denial is to inform the appellant of the reason for the denial and the right to judicial review of that denial under 5 U.S.C. 552(a)(4)(B). If the FOIA Appeals Officer is unable to act on an appeal within the 20-day period (or any extension thereof pursuant to §103.8(a)), the FOIA Appeals Officer shall send written notice of that fact to the appellant. In those circumstances, an appellant is entitled to commence an action in a district court as provided in §103.9 despite any continuation in the processing of an appeal. However, the appellant may also be invited, in the alternative, to agree to a voluntary extension of time in which to decide the appeal. A voluntary extension does not waive the right of the appellant to ultimately commence an action in a

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United States district court on the appellant's request.

[T.D. 81-168, 46 FR 32565, June 24, 1981, as amended by T.D. 99-27, 64 FR 13675, Mar. 22, 1999]

§ 103.8 Time extensions.

(a) *Ten-day extension.* In unusual circumstances, the Customs officer who is responsible for deciding an initial request or an appeal may extend the time limitations set in §§103.6 and 103.7 after written notice to the requester or appellant. This notice must state the reason for the extension and the date on which the determination is expected to be dispatched. Any extension or extensions of time are limited to a cumulative total of not more than 10 additional working days. (For example, if an extension pursuant to this paragraph is invoked in connection with an initial determination, any unused days of the extension period may be invoked in connection with the determination on administrative appeal by written notice from the FOIA Appeals Officer, who is to make the appellate determination. If no extension is sought for the initial determination, an extension of 10 days may be added to the ordinary 20-day period for appellant review.) Generally, extensions will be invoked only to the extent reasonably necessary to properly respond to a request. As used in this paragraph, "unusual circumstances" means at least one of the following:

(1) The need to search for and collect the requested records from field facilities or other establishments in buildings other than the building in which the office of the Customs officer to whom the request is made is located.

(2) The need to search for, collect, and appropriately examine a voluminous amount of separate and distinct records which are demanded in a single request.

(3) The need for consultation, which shall be conducted with all practicable speed, with another Department or agency having a substantial interest in the determination of the request, among two or more constituent units within the Department of the Treasury, or within offices of the United States Customs Service (other than the legal staff or Office of Congressional &

Public Affairs) having substantial subject-matter interest therein. Consultations with personnel of the Department of Justice concerned with requests for records under the Freedom of Information Act, as amended (5 U.S.C. 552), do not constitute a basis for an extension under this paragraph.

(b) *Extension by judicial review.* If the United States Customs Service fails to comply with the time limitations specified in §§103.6 and 103.7 and the requester commences an action under §103.9, the court in which the suit was initiated may retain jurisdiction and allow the United States Customs Service additional time to review its records, if the Customs Service shows the existence of exceptional circumstances and the exercise of due diligence in responding to the request.

[T.D. 81-168, 46 FR 32565, June 24, 1981; 46 FR 35084, July 7, 1981, as amended by T.D. 91-77, 56 FR 46114, Sept. 10, 1991]

§ 103.9 Judicial review.

(a) *Failure to comply with time limitations.* If the United States Customs Service fails to comply with the time limitations specified in §§103.6, 103.7 or §103.8, a requester is considered to have exhausted the administrative remedies with respect to the request.

(b) *Procedure of initiating judicial review.* If a request for records is denied upon appeal pursuant to §103.7, or if no determination is made within the 10-day or 20-day periods specified in §§103.6 and 103.7, respectively, together with an extension pursuant to §103.8(a) or by agreement of the requester, the requester may commence an action under 5 U.S.C. 552(a)(4)(B) in a United States district court in the district (1) in which the requester resides, (2) in which the requester's principal place of business is located, (3) in which the records are situated, or (4) in the District of Columbia. Service of process in that action is governed by the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure (28 U.S.C. App.) applicable to actions against an agency of the United States. The Chief Counsel, United States Customs Service, 1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW., Washington, DC 20229 is the officer designated to receive any service of process.