

Office of the Secretary, Interior

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(5) If a requester brings suit to compel disclosure of information, the submitter of the information will be promptly notified.

§2.16 Action on initial requests.

(a) *Authority.* (1) Requests to field installations shall be decided by the head of the installation or by such higher authority as the head of the bureau may designate in writing.

(2) Requests to the headquarters of a bureau shall be decided only by the head of the bureau or an official whom the head of the bureau has in writing designated.

(3) Requests to the Office of the Secretary may be decided by the Director of Administrative Services, an Assistant Secretary or Assistant Secretary's designee, and any official whom the Secretary has in writing designated.

(4) A decision to withhold a requested record, to release a record that is exempt from disclosure, or to deny a fee waiver shall be made only after consultation with the office of the appropriate associate, regional, or field solicitor.

(b) *Form of grant.* (1) When a requested record has been determined to be available, the official processing the request shall notify the requester as to when and where the record is available for inspection or, as the case may be, when and how copies will be provided. If fees are due, the official shall state the amount of fees due and the procedures for payment, as described in §2.20.

(2) If a requested record (or portion thereof) is being made available over the objections of a submitter made in accordance with §2.15(d), both the requester and the submitter shall be notified of the decision. The notice to the submitter (a copy of which shall be made available to the requester) shall be forwarded a reasonable number of days prior to the date on which disclosure is to be made and shall include:

(i) A statement of the reasons why the submitter's objections were not sustained;

(ii) A specification of the portions of the record to be disclosed, if the submitter's objections were sustained in part; and

(iii) A specified disclosure date.

(3) If a claim of confidentiality has been found frivolous in accordance with §2.15(d)(4)(vi) and a determination is made to release the information without consultation with the submitter, the submitter of the information shall be notified of the decision and the reasons therefor a reasonable number of days prior to the date on which disclosure is to be made.

(c) *Form of denial.* (1) A decision withholding a requested record shall be in writing and shall include:

(i) A reference to the specific exemption or exemptions authorizing the withholding;

(ii) If neither a statute or an Executive order requires withholding, the sound ground for withholding;

(iii) A listing of the names and titles or positions of each person responsible for the denial; and

(iv) A statement that the denial may be appealed to the Assistant Secretary—Policy, Budget and Administration and a description of the procedures in §2.18 for appeal.

(2) A decision denying a request for failure to reasonably describe requested records or for other procedural deficiency or because requested records cannot be located shall be in writing and shall include:

(i) A description of the basis of the decision;

(ii) A list of the names and titles or positions of each person responsible; and

(iii) A statement that the matter may be appealed to the Assistant Secretary—Policy, Budget and Administration and a description of the procedures in §2.18 for appeal.

§2.17 Time limits for processing initial requests.

(a) *Basic limit.* Requests for records shall be processed promptly. A determination whether to grant or deny a request shall be made within no more than 10 working days after receipt of a request. This determination shall be communicated immediately to the requester.

(b) *Running of basic time limit.* (1) The 10 working day time limit begins to run when a request meeting the requirements of §2.14(b) is received at a

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field installation or bureau headquarters designated in § 2.14(a) to receive the request.

(2) The running of the basic time limit may be delayed or tolled as explained in § 2.20 (f), (g) and (h) if a requester—

(i) Has not stated a willingness to pay fees as high as are anticipated and has not sought and been granted a full fee waiver, or

(ii) Has not made a required advance payment.

(c) *Extensions of time.* In the following unusual circumstances, the time limit for acting on an initial request may be extended to the extent reasonably necessary to the proper processing of the request, but in no case may the time limit be extended for more than 10 working days:

(1) The need to search for and collect the requested records from field facilities or other establishments that are separate from the installation processing the request;

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

(3) The need for consultation, which shall be conducted with all practicable speed, with another agency having a substantial interest in the determination of the request or among two or more components of the Department having substantial subject-matter interest therein.

(d) *Notice of extension.* A requester shall be notified in writing of an extension under paragraph (c) of this section. The notice shall state the reason for the extension and the date on which a determination on the request is expected to be made.

(e) *Treatment of delay as denial.* If no determination has been reached at the end of the 10 working day period for deciding an initial request, or an extension thereof under paragraph (c) of this section, the requester may deem the request denied and may exercise a right of appeal in accordance with § 2.18.

(f) *Notice of delay.* When a determination cannot be reached within the time limit, or extension thereof, the requester shall be notified of the reason

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for the delay, of the date on which a determination may be expected, and of the right to treat the delay as a denial for purposes of appeal to the Assistant Secretary—Policy, Budget and Administration, including a description of the procedures for filing an appeal in § 2.18.

§ 2.18 Appeals.

(a) *Right of appeal.* A requester may appeal to the Assistant Secretary—Policy, Budget and Administration when—

(1) Records have been withheld,

(2) A request has been denied for failure to describe requested records or for other procedural deficiency or because requested records cannot be located,

(3) A fee waiver has been denied, or

(4) A request has not been decided within the time limits provided in § 2.17.

(b) *Time for appeal.* An appeal must be received no later than 20 working days after the date of the initial denial, in the case of a denial of an entire request, or 20 working days after records have been made available, in the case of a partial denial.

(c) *Form of appeal.* (1) An appeal shall be initiated by filing a written notice of appeal. The notice shall be accompanied by copies of the original request and the initial denial and should, in order to expedite the appellate process and give the requester an opportunity to present his or her arguments, contain a brief statement of the reasons why the requester believes the initial denial to have been in error.

(2) The appeal shall be addressed to the Freedom of Information Act Appeals Officer, Office of the Assistant Secretary—Policy, Budget and Administration, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, DC 20240.

(3) To expedite processing, both the envelope containing a notice of appeal and the face of the notice should bear the legend “FREEDOM OF INFORMATION APPEAL.”

§ 2.19 Action on appeals.

(a) *Authority.* Appeals shall be decided by the Assistant Secretary—Policy, Budget and Administration, or the Assistant Secretary’s designee, after consultation with the Solicitor, the Director of Public Affairs and the appropriate program Assistant Secretary.