

**§ 103.5 Specific requests for records.**

(a) *In general.* Except with respect to the records made available under §§ 103.3 and 103.4, but subject to the application of the exemptions described in § 103.12, the United States Customs Service is required, by 5 U.S.C. 552(a)(3), upon a request for reasonably-described records that conforms in every respect to the rules and procedures of this part, to make the requested records promptly available to the requester. A request or an appeal from the initial denial of a request which does not comply with the requirements set forth in this part is not subject to the time limits of §§ 103.6, 103.7, and 103.8 until amended so as to comply. Nevertheless, every reasonable effort will be made to answer each request within the applicable time limits or, if necessary, to promptly advise the requester in what respect the request or appeal is deficient so that it may be resubmitted or amended for consideration in accordance with this part. This section applies only to existing records which are in the possession or control of the United States Customs Service. There is no requirement that records be created or data be processed in other than the existing format in order to answer a request for records.

(b) *Requests for records not in control of the United States Customs Service—(1) Referral of request.* Where the request is for a record in the possession of, under the control of, or created by a constituent unit of the Department of the Treasury other than the United States Customs Service, the appropriate Customs officer shall transfer the request to the appropriate constituent unit and notify the requester of that transfer. Forwarding a request to another constituent unit is not a denial of access within the meaning of these regulations. If the United States Customs Service receives a request forwarded from another constituent unit of the Department of the Treasury, the time limits for response set forth in §§ 103.6(b) and 103.8(a) commence upon receipt of the request by the Disclosure Law Officer, U.S. Customs Service. If the United States Customs Service receives a request for a record that is not in the possession or control of any constituent unit of the Department of the

Treasury, the appropriate Customs officer shall return the request to the sender with an explanation of that fact.

(2) *Request for advice.* If the Customs Service has a copy of a requested unclassified record that was created by a Department or agency other than a constituent unit of the Department of the Treasury, the appropriate Customs officer shall ask that Department or agency for its advice on the release of the record. The appropriate Customs officer shall advise the other Department or agency that, in the absence of timely guidance from it, the United States Customs Service will proceed to make its own determination in accordance with this part. If it becomes necessary to respond to a requester because of the time limits set forth in §§ 103.6(b) and 103.8(a) without the advice of the other Department or agency, the appropriate Customs officer shall make the determination in accordance with this part and advise the requester accordingly. If the appropriate Customs officer denies access to the record under one of the exemptions set forth in § 103.12, that officer shall advise the requester of the right to appeal the denial and of the possibility of sending a request for the record directly to the originating Department or agency. If a requester appeals from a denial to the United States Customs Service, the appropriate Customs officer shall ask the originating Department or agency for timely advice on whether to release the records. Nevertheless, the ultimate decision on the appeal from a denial of access to a record rests with the FOIA Appeals Officer, as set forth in § 103.7.

(3) *Classified records.* If the Customs Service has a copy of a requested record created by a Department or agency other than a constituent unit of the Department of the Treasury, and that record is classified or contains both classified and unclassified material, the request shall be referred to the originating Department or agency for a direct response. The requester shall be notified immediately of the referral. Such referral shall not constitute a denial of the request and no appeal rights accrue to the requester.

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(c) *Form of request.* Although no standard form is prescribed for a request, in order to be subject to the provisions of this section and §§103.6 through 103.9, a request for records must:

(1) Be made in writing and signed by the person making that request;

(2) State that it is made pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act, as amended (5 U.S.C. 552), or these regulations, and have conspicuously printed on the face of the envelope the words “Freedom of Information Act Request” or “FOIA Request”;

(3) Be addressed to the appropriate office or officer of the United States Customs Service, as set forth in paragraph (d) of this section;

(4) Reasonably describe the records in accordance with paragraph (e) of this section.

(5) Set forth the address where the person making the request desires to be notified of the determination as to whether the request will be granted;

(6) State whether the requester wishes to inspect the records or desires to have a copy made and furnished without first inspecting them; and

(7) State the firm agreement of the requester to pay the fees for search and duplication ultimately determined in accordance with §103.10, or request that such fees be reduced or waived and state the justification for such request (see §103.10(d)).

Where the initial request, rather than stating a firm agreement to pay the fee ultimately determined in accordance with §103.10, places an upper limit on the amount the requester agrees to pay and that upper limit is likely to be lower than the estimated fee, or where the requester asks for an estimate of the fees to be charged, or if the fees are expected to exceed \$50, the appropriate Customs officer shall promptly advise the requester of the estimated fee due and ask the requester to agree to pay that amount. Where the initial request includes a request for reduction or waiver of fees, the appropriate Customs officer shall determine whether to grant the request for reduction or waiver in accordance with §103.10(d) and notify the requester of the decision. If the officer decides to charge the requester for all or part of the fees

normally due, the officer shall ask the requester to agree to pay the amount so determined. The requirements of this paragraph are not met until the requester agrees, in writing, to pay the fees applicable to the request for records, if any, or has made payment in advance of the fees estimated to be due.

(d) *To whom requests for records should be addressed—*(1) *Headquarters.* Requests made by mail for records maintained at the Headquarters of the United States Customs Service should be addressed to “Freedom of Information Act Request,” U.S. Customs Service, 1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW., Washington, DC 20229. Requests may be delivered personally to the Disclosure Law Officer, U.S. Customs Service, Headquarters, Washington, DC.

(2) *Field offices.* A person shall request records or information maintained in a field office of the United States Customs Service by either mailing or personally delivering the request to the director of the service port, or if the records concern the Office of Investigations, the special agent in charge, where the field office is located.

(e) *Reasonable description of records.* A request for records must describe the records in reasonably sufficient detail to enable a Customs officer who is familiar with the subject area of the request to locate the records without placing an unreasonably burden upon the United States Customs Service. While no specific formula for a reasonable description of a record can be established, the requirement is usually satisfied if the requester gives the name, subject matter, and, if known, the date and location of the requested record. However, a requester should furnish any additional information which will more clearly identify the requested records. If a request does not reasonably describe the records being sought, the appropriate Customs officer shall ask the requester to refine the request. If necessary a requester may be granted a conference with knowledgeable Customs personnel. The requirement for a reasonable description is not a device for improperly withholding records from the public.

(f) *Date of receipt of request.* A request for records is considered to have been

received for purposes of this part on the later of the dates on which:

(1) The requirements of paragraph (c) of this section have been satisfied; and, where applicable,

(2) The requester has agreed in writing, by executing a separate contract or otherwise, to pay the fees for search and duplication determined to be due in accordance with §103.10; or

(3) The fees have been waived in accordance with §103.10(d); or

(4) Payment in advance has been received from the requester.

A Customs officer or employee who receives a request for records and a separate agreement to pay, or a letter transmitting prepayment, or who issues a final notification of waiver of fees, shall stamp the date of receipt or dispatch by the responsible office on the material. The latest of those dates is the date of receipt of the request. As soon as the date of receipt has been established, the appropriate Customs officer shall acknowledge receipt and inform the requester of the title of the Customs officer who is responsible for acting on the request.

(g) *Search for record requested.* Upon the receipt of a request, the appropriate Customs officer shall attempt to identify and locate the requested records. With respect to records maintained in computerized form, a search for a record includes services functionally analogous to searches for records which are maintained in a conventional form. However, Customs personnel are not required to tabulate or compile information for the purpose of creating a record. Only records in existence at the time of the receipt of the request will be treated as falling within the scope of the request and no request for the continuing production of documents created after receipt of the request will be honored.

(h) *“Request for record” defined.* For purposes of uniformity in record-keeping a “request for a record” is defined as a written request for a record of the U.S. Customs Service which has not been published in the FEDERAL REGISTER, the Customs Bulletin, by press release, or otherwise, or made available in a public reading room, or which has not previously been customarily furnished to requesters, whether

or not the request makes reference to the Freedom of Information Act, as amended (5 U.S.C. 552).

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#### § 103.6 Grant or denial of initial request.

(a) *Officers designated to make initial determinations—(1) Service ports.* The appropriate director of a service port, or in the case of records of the Office of Investigations, the appropriate special agent in charge (SAC), shall make any initial determination of a request for a record which is maintained, respectively, at that service port or under the SAC’s jurisdiction.

(2) *Headquarters.* For records located at Customs Service Headquarters, the initial determination to grant or deny a request shall be made by the appropriate Division Director at Customs Service Headquarters having custody of or functional jurisdiction over the subject matter of the requested records. In the event the request relates to records which are maintained in an office which is not within a division, the initial determination shall be made by the individual designated for that purpose by the Assistant Commissioner having responsibility for that office.

(b) *Time limit for initial determinations.* The time limit for making an initial determination to grant or deny a request for records, including the time for notifying the requester of that determination, is 10 days (excepting Saturdays, Sundays, and legal public holidays) after the date of receipt of the request (see §103.5(f)), unless the designated officer invokes an extension pursuant to §103.8(a) or the requester otherwise agrees to an extension.

(c) *Grant of request.* If the appropriate Customs officer grants a request, and if the requester wants a copy of the requested records, that officer shall mail a copy of those records to the requester together with a statement of the fees for search and duplication at the time of the determination or promptly thereafter. If a requester wants to inspect the record, the appropriate Customs officer who grants the request