

searching, even if it fails to locate the records or if the records located are determined to be exempt from disclosure.

(c) *Advance payment.* The Department may not require a requester to make an advance payment, *i.e.*, payment before work is commenced or continued on a request, unless:

(1) It estimates or determines that allowable charges that a requester may be required to pay are likely to exceed \$250. In such a case, the Department shall notify the requester of the likely cost and obtain satisfactory assurance of full payment where the requester has a history of prompt payment of FOIA fees, or shall require an advance payment of an amount up to the full estimated charges in the case of requesters with no history of payment; or

(2) A requester has previously failed to pay within 30 days of the date of the billing a fee charged. In such a case, the Department shall require the requester to pay the full amount previously owed plus any applicable interest and to make an advance payment of the full amount of the estimated fee before the Department begins to process a new or pending request from that requester. If a requester has failed to pay a fee charged by another U.S. Government agency in an information access case, the Department may require proof that such fee has been paid before processing a new or pending request from that requester.

(3) When the Department acts under paragraph (c)(1) or (2) of this section, the administrative time limits prescribed in the FOIA, 5 U.S.C. 552(a)(6) (*i.e.*, 20 working days from receipt of initial requests and 20 working days from receipt of appeals from initial denial, plus permissible extensions of these time limits), will begin only after the Department has received fee payments described in paragraphs (c)(1) and (2) of this section.

(d) *Aggregating requests.* When the Department reasonably believes that a requester, or a group of requesters acting in concert, has submitted multiple requests involving related matters solely to avoid payment of fees, the Department may aggregate those requests for purposes of assessing processing fees.

(e) *Effect of the Debt Collection Act of 1982 (Pub. L. 97-365).* The Department shall comply with provisions of the Debt Collection Act, including disclosure to consumer reporting agencies and use of collection agencies, where appropriate, to effect repayment.

§ 171.17 Waiver or reduction of fees.

(a) Fees otherwise chargeable in connection with a request for disclosure of a record shall be waived or reduced where it is determined that disclosure is in the public interest because it is likely to contribute significantly to public understanding of the operations or activities of the Government and is not primarily in the commercial interest of the requester.

(1) In order to determine whether disclosure of the information is in the public interest because it is likely to contribute significantly to public understanding of the operations or activities of the government, the Department will consider the following four factors:

(i) The subject of the request, *i.e.*, whether the subject of the requested records concerns the operations or activities of the government;

(ii) The informative value of the information to be disclosed, *i.e.*, whether the disclosure is likely to contribute to an understanding of government operations or activities;

(iii) The contribution to an understanding of the subject by the general public likely to result from disclosure, *i.e.*, whether disclosure of the requested information will contribute to public understanding, including whether the requester has expertise in the subject area as well as the intention and ability to disseminate the information to the public; and

(iv) The significance of the contribution to public understanding, *i.e.*, whether the disclosure is likely to contribute significantly to public understanding of government operations or activities.

(2) In order to determine whether disclosure of the information is not primarily in the commercial interest of the requester, the Department will consider the following two factors:

(i) The existence and magnitude of a commercial interest, *i.e.*, whether the

requester has a commercial interest that would be furthered by the requested disclosure; and, if so,

(ii) The primary interest in disclosure, *i.e.*, whether the magnitude of the identified commercial interest of the requester is sufficiently large, in comparison with the public interest in disclosure, that disclosure is primarily in the commercial interest of the requester.

(b) The Department may refuse to consider waiver or reduction of fees for requesters (persons or organizations) from whom unpaid fees remain owed to the Department for another information access request.

(c) Where only some of the records to be released satisfy the requirements for a waiver or reduction of fees, a waiver or reduction shall be granted for only those records.

(d) The Department's decision to refuse to waive or reduce fees may be appealed in accordance with § 171.51.

Subpart C—Executive Order 12958 Provisions

§ 171.20 Definitions.

As used in this subpart, the following definitions shall apply:

(a) *Agency* means any executive branch agency, as defined in 5 U.S.C. 105, any military department, as defined by 5 U.S.C. 102, and any other entity within the executive branch that comes into possession of classified information.

(b) *Classified information* means information that has been determined pursuant to E.O. 12958 or any predecessor order on national security information to require protection against unauthorized disclosure and is marked to indicate its classified status when in documentary form.

(c) *Declassification* means the authorized change in the status of information from classified information to unclassified information.

(d) *Department* means the U.S. Department of State, including its field offices and Foreign Service posts abroad.

(e) *FOIA* means the Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. 552.

(f) *Foreign government information* means:

(1) Information provided to the United States Government by a foreign government or governments, an international organization of governments, or any element thereof, with the expectation that the information, the source of the information, or both, are to be held in confidence;

(2) Information produced by the United States pursuant to or as a result of a joint arrangement with a foreign government or governments, or an international organization of governments, or any element thereof, requiring that the information, the arrangement, or both, are to be held in confidence; or

(3) Information received and treated as foreign government information under the terms of a predecessor executive order.

(g) *Information* means any knowledge that can be communicated or documentary material, regardless of its physical form or characteristics that is owned by, produced by or for, or is under the control of the United States Government.

(h) *Mandatory declassification review* means the process by which specific classified information is reviewed for declassification pursuant to a request under § 171.21.

(i) *National Security* means the national defense or foreign relations of the United States.

(j) *Certain former government personnel* includes former officials of the Department of State or other U.S. Government agencies who previously have occupied policy-making positions to which they were appointed by the President under 3 U.S.C. 105(a)(2)(A) or by the Vice President under 3 U.S.C. 106(a)(1)(A). It does not include former Foreign Service Officers as a class or persons who merely received assignment commissions as Foreign Service Officers, Foreign Service Reserve Officers, Foreign Service Staff Officers and employees.

(k) *Senior Agency Official* means the Under Secretary of State for Management.

§ 171.21 Declassification review.

(a) *Scope.* All information classified under E.O. 12958 or predecessor orders