



U.S. DECLASSIFIED DOCUMENTS ONLINE CLASSIFICATION DEFINITIONS

BACKGROUND ON CLASSIFICATION

To get the most out of *U.S. Declassified Documents Online*, it is helpful to understand generally how the federal government has handled classified materials. There are three basic levels of classification for national security information: confidential, secret, and top secret. The test for assigning confidential classification is whether its unauthorized disclosure could reasonably be expected to cause damage to the national security. Secret documents are expected to have the potential to cause serious damage. Top secret documents require the highest degree of protection and may cause exceptionally grave damage to national security. Examples of exceptionally grave damage include armed hostilities against the United States or its allies; disruption of foreign relations vitally affecting the national security; the revelation of sensitive intelligence operations; and the disclosure of scientific or technological developments vital to the national security.

CLASSIFICATIONS EXPLAINED

Confidential

Will be applied to information in which the unauthorized disclosure could reasonably be expected to cause damage to the national security. Confidential refers to national security information or material which requires protection. The test for assigning Confidential classification shall be whether its unauthorized disclosure could reasonably be expected to cause damage to the national security.

Eyes Only

Eyes Only Messages - A privacy communication from one named individual to another individual. Delivery of this type of message is restricted to the named addressee or to those personnel (contacts) the addressee has authorized to receive such messages. No further dissemination is permitted unless so directed by addressee or authorized member of his staff.

Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), Special Operations Branch Office Procedure No. 35-2, January 13, 1974

Limited Official Use

This administrative control designation is used to identify nondefense information requiring protection from unauthorized access. Material identified with this notation must be limited to persons having a definite need to know in order to fulfill their official responsibilities. See also "Limited Distribution".

No Foreign Dissemination

Identified classified intelligence that may not be released in any form to foreign governments, foreign nationals, foreign organizations, or non-U.S. citizens without permission of the originator. May be used only with Top Secret, Secret, or Confidential. Information may not be disseminated in any form to foreign governments, foreign nationals, foreign or international organizations, or non-US citizens.

Official Use

Unclassified information of a sensitive nature, not otherwise categorized by statute or regulation, the unauthorized disclosure of which could adversely affect a person's privacy or welfare, the conduct of Federal programs, or other programs or operations essential to the national interest. "Official Use" includes minimum protection requirements and recommends additional security safeguards to be applied where warranted by the sensitivity of the information. Official Use information is unclassified information of a sensitive, proprietary or personally private nature which must be protected against release to unauthorized individuals. Information which impacts on the national security of the United States and is classified Confidential, Secret or Top Secret under Executive Order 12356 is not to be considered as Official Use.

Omitted

Omitted documents do not have a security classification indicated. Information assigned a level of classification under predecessor orders shall be considered as classified at that level of classification despite the omission of other required markings. Whenever such information is used in the derivative classification process or is reviewed for possible declassification, holders of such information shall coordinate with an appropriate classification authority for the application of omitted markings.

Restricted

Before World War II and into the 1950's, the U.S. had a category of classified information called Restricted, which was below Confidential. "Restricted" later came to refer to "Restricted Data" or "RD", which comprises all data concerning design, manufacture or utilization of atomic weapons; the production or special nuclear material; or the use of special nuclear material in the production of energy and may be used only with Top Secret, Secret, or Confidential. Both uses of the term will be found in USDDO.

Secret

Will be applied to information in which the unauthorized disclosure could reasonably be expected to cause serious damage to the national security. Secret refers to national security information or material which requires a substantial degree of protection. The test for assigning Secret classification shall be whether its unauthorized disclosure could reasonably be expected to cause serious damage to the national security. Examples of serious damage include disruption of foreign relations significantly affecting the national security; significant impairment of a program or policy directly related to the national security; revelation of significant military plans or intelligence operations; and compromise of significant scientific or technological developments relating to national security. The classification Secret shall be sparingly used.

Top Secret

Will be applied to information in which the unauthorized disclosure could reasonably be expected to cause exceptionally grave damage to the national security. Top Secret refers to national security information or material which requires the highest degree of protection. The test for assigning Top Secret classification is whether its unauthorized disclosure could reasonably be expected to cause exceptionally grave damage to the national security. Examples of exceptionally grave damage include armed hostilities against the United States or its allies; disruption of foreign relations vitally affecting the national security; the compromise of vital national defense plans or complex cryptologic and communications intelligence systems; the revelation of sensitive intelligence operations; and the disclosure of scientific or technological developments vital to national security. This classification is to be used with the utmost restraint.

Unclassified

Unclassified is not technically a classification; this is the default and refers to information that can be released to individuals without a clearance. Information that is unclassified is sometimes restricted in its dissemination as Controlled Unclassified Information. Classified information shall be marked as declassified before it is handled as unclassified. Unclassified information may be released to the public.

Additional Useful Terminology

NOFORN

No foreign dissemination: Information may not be disseminated in any form to foreign governments, nationals, or international organizations, or non-US citizens

FED ONLY

Federal employees only: Dissemination authorized only to (1) employees of United States Government Executive branch departments and agencies (2) armed forces personnel of the US or Active Guard and Reserve

FEDCON

Federal Employees and Contractors only: Dissemination authorized only to (1) employees of United States Government Executive branch departments and agencies (2) armed forces personnel of the US or Active Guard and Reserve or (3) individuals or employers who enter into a contract with the United States (any department or agency) to perform a specific job, supply labor and materials, or for the sale of products and services, so long as dissemination is in furtherance of that contractual purpose.

NOCON

No dissemination to Contractors: No dissemination authorized to individuals or employers who enter into a contract with the United States (any department or agency) to perform a specific job, supply labor and materials, or for the sale of products and services.

DL ONLY

Dissemination List Controlled: Dissemination authorized only to those individuals, organizations, or entities included on an accompanying dissemination list.

REL TO [USA, LIST]

Authorized for release to certain nationals only: Information has been predetermined by the designating agency to be releasable or has been released only to the foreign country(ies)/international organization(s)* indicated, through established foreign disclosure procedures and channels.

DISPLAY ONLY

Information is authorized for disclosure to a foreign recipient, but without providing the foreign recipient with a physical copy for retention, regardless of medium to the foreign country(ies)/international organization(s) indicated, through established foreign disclosure procedures and channels.