Privacy Impact Assessment Update
for the

Department Freedom of Information Act and Privacy Act Records Program

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Abstract

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and Privacy Act (PA) process for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is maintained by the DHS Office of the Chief Privacy Officer (PRIV). The FOIA and PA process allows individuals to request access to federal agency records. DHS PRIV has deployed new software which allows this process to be more efficient and automated. This Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA) Update is being conducted to document the new uses, reporting, and internal information sharing of the PII collected in the FOIA and PA process.

Overview

The Freedom of Information Act is a federal statute that generally provides that any person has the right to request access to federal agency records. FOIA also establishes a presumption that records in the possession of the agencies and departments of the Executive Branch of the U.S. government are accessible to the people, except to the extent those records are protected from disclosure by any of nine exemptions contained in the law or by one of three special law enforcement exclusions. DHS FOIA and PA Disclosure section of the DHS Privacy Office exists to promote transparency of Department Operations.

The DHS FOIA Office has implemented a new Commercial-Off-the-Shelf (COTS) IT system that enhances the ability of headquarters and component FOIA offices within DHS to receive, track, and respond to FOIA and PA requests. This new web-based application, FOIAXpress, allows for more accurate tracking, accounting, and accountability by automating the FOIA and PA request process. Components that use FOIAXpress enter data directly into the system rather than updating and tracking FOIA and PA requests using an Excel spreadsheet as done previously. This increased functionality will provide for more accurate reporting to the Department of Justice, as required by 5 U.S.C. § 552. The DHS FOIA Office has deployed this application to improve responses to FOIA requests received by the Department and will maintain the user rights and data. Other DHS components will also use this software system to respond to FOIA requests received by their respective offices.

Reason for the PIA Update

The reason for this update is to reflect modifications to the uses and internal sharing of this information due to the new reporting capabilities. FOIAXpress will enhance the ability of DHS components and Headquarters offices (HQ) to receive, track, distribute, and respond to FOIA and PA requests. Access to FOIAXpress allows HQ to run reports at the HQ and component levels. This enhanced functionality allows for more accurate reporting to the Department of Justice, and changes the Information Sharing section of the original PIA.

In addition, the HQ Administrator will have the ability to view individual component FOIA and PA requests for common trouble shooting issues. The HQ Administrator may manage user accounts, change case numbers, and assign cases which users with lesser privileges cannot do. This ability is role based and only permitted for a small number of HQ FOIA officers.

Privacy Impact Analysis

In each of the below sections consider how the system has changed and what impact it has on the below fair information principles. In some cases there may be no changes and indicate as such.

Authorities and Other Requirements

No changes from original PIA.

Characterization of the Information

No changes from original PIA.

Uses of the Information

FOIAXpress allows authorized users within the DHS FOIA Office to run reports to provide detailed statistics on the agency's FOIA activities, including the number of requests the agency received during a period of time (e.g., past quarter, past fiscal year), the number of requests processed, the disposition of the requests, and the number of requests that remain in the backlog. This reporting function was not available in the previous FOIA and PA Request process. In addition, the HQ Administrator will be able to view individual FOIA and PA requests in order to perform common troubleshooting issues when requested by DHS components.

Notice

No changes from original PIA.

Data Retention by the project

No changes from original PIA.

Information Sharing

FOIAXpress allows for more automated and efficient internal sharing of information by permitting DHS HQ and components access to the software. By accessing FOIAXpress, the DHS FOIA Office now has the ability to review FOIA and PA requests submitted to HQ and DHS components as the system owner. DHS HQ will primarily use this capability to troubleshoot issues such as managing user accounts, changing case numbers, and assigning cases and to run reports more quickly and efficiently. The troubleshooting enhancements help components process FOIA and PA requests more efficiently. FOIAXpress allows components to transfer cases to other components when necessary. Regular users of FOIAXpress have limited privileges within the system based on their duties and need-to-know, and will not have the ability to transfer cases, view other component's FOIA and PA requests, or perform troubleshooting activities. DHS components without access to FOIAXpress will continue to share records responsive to a request that involves multiple DHS components by using the current FOIA and PA process.

Redress

No changes from original PIA.

Auditing and Accountability

No change from original PIA.

Responsible Official

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Approval Signature

Original signed and on file with the DHS Privacy Office.

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