



## SECURITY CLEARANCE FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**1. WHAT IS A PERSONNEL SECURITY CLEARANCE?** A personnel security clearance is an administrative determination that a military, civilian, or industrial (contractor) employee (hereafter referred to as “employees”) is eligible for access to classified information. This determination is based on investigation and review of available personal data and a finding that access is clearly consistent with national interests.

**2. WHO ISSUES THE PERSONNEL SECURITY CLEARANCE?** The Department of Defense issues the personnel security clearances for U.S. citizen employees who require access to classified information. Clearances may be at the TOP SECRET, SECRET or CONFIDENTIAL level. Requests for clearances are sent to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) for military and civilian employees, and the Defense Industrial Security Clearance Office (DISCO) for industry personnel on behalf of the DoD and User Agencies. Personnel security clearances must be kept to an absolute minimum based on needs of the organization.

**3. WHO MAY HAVE ACCESS TO CLASSIFIED INFORMATION?** Only those persons who have a bona fide need-to-know and who possess a personnel security clearance at the same or higher level as the classified information to be disclosed may have access to classified information.

**4. WHEN MAY AN INDIVIDUAL BE PROCESSED FOR A PERSONNEL SECURITY CLEARANCE?** An individual may be processed for a personnel security clearance when employed in a job requiring access to classified information.

**5. ARE non-U.S. CITIZENS ELIGIBLE FOR A PERSONNEL SECURITY CLEARANCE?** No. However, under rare circumstances, a non-U.S. citizen may be issued a Limited Access Authorization for access to classified information. Specific criteria and limitations are provided in the National Industrial Security Program Operating Manual (NISPOM).

**6. MAY AN INDIVIDUAL WHO HAS BEEN GRANTED A SECURITY CLEARANCE BE AUTHORIZED ACCESS TO ANY AND ALL CLASSIFIED INFORMATION?** No. The individual must have both the appropriate level of personnel security clearance and a need-to-know for the classified information.

**7. HOW LONG DOES A PERSONNEL SECURITY CLEARANCE REMAIN IN EFFECT?** Generally speaking, a personnel security clearance remains in effect as long as the individual remains continuously employed by the DoD and can reasonably be expected to require access to classified information.

**8. WHO MAY APPLY FOR A SECURITY CLEARANCE?** Individuals cannot apply for a personnel security clearance application on their own. Rather, the organization or company determines whether an employee will require access to classified information in performance of tasks or services related to their duties.

**9. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A SECURITY CLEARANCE?** The purpose of a security clearance is to determine whether a person is able and willing to safeguard classified national security information, based on his or her loyalty, character, trustworthiness, and reliability.

**10. WHO DECIDES WHAT LEVEL OF CLEARANCE A PERSON RECEIVES?** The organization determines the positions that require a security clearance, as well as the level required, based upon the duties and responsibilities of each position.

**11. WHAT KIND OF INVESTIGATION IS CONDUCTED TO MAKE THIS DETERMINATION?** The kind, or type, of investigation conducted depends on the access level that the individual is required to have to perform his or her official duties. For access to CONFIDENTIAL or SECRET information, a National Agency Check with Local Agency Checks and Credit Check (NACLC) is completed. For access to TOP SECRET or Sensitive Compartmented Information (SCI) information, a Single Scope Background Investigation (SSBI) is required.

**12. HOW MANY TYPES OR LEVELS OF SECURITY CLEARANCE ARE THERE?** There are three levels of security clearance, with the highest level being TOP SECRET. SECRET is the next level of clearance and CONFIDENTIAL is the lowest level. In addition, some classified information has extra protection measures applied such as SCI and Special Access Programs (SAP). Special approval must be given to have access to this information. "For Official Use Only" is not a security classification. It is used to protect information covered under the Privacy Act and other sensitive data.

**13. WHAT WORK DOES EACH CLEARANCE ALLOW A PERSON TO DO?** A clearance allows a person filling a specific position to have access to classified national security information up to and including the level of clearance that they hold, so long as the person has a need to know for the information to perform his or her duties.

**14. WILL MY CLEARANCE TRANSFER TO OTHER FEDERAL AGENCIES?** In most cases it will transfer. All federal agencies adjudicate using the 13 Adjudication Guidelines and reciprocal recognition of existing personnel security clearance adjudications throughout the national security community is strongly emphasized by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). OMB has issued guidance regarding reciprocity of access eligibility determinations to ensure that investigations are only conducted to grant new security clearances when they are actually required.

**15. DOES HAVING A SECURITY CLEARANCE GUARANTEE EMPLOYMENT WITH AN ORGANIZATION?** No. The hiring process addresses whether someone will be initially selected for a particular position within an organization. The security clearance process does not begin until after an applicant is hired or the organization has made a written commitment for employment and the applicant has accepted the offer in writing. Further, personnel security clearances are only initiated when employees will have a need for access to classified information to perform his or her duties.

**16. WHO CONDUCTS THE INVESTIGATION?** The Department of Defense has entered into an agreement with the Office of Personnel Management to conduct the majority of the personnel security investigations (PSIs) performed in connection with granting access to classified information. OPM uses government and contract investigators to conduct these investigations.

**17. ARE MEMBERS OF MY FAMILY OR PEOPLE LIVING WITH ME SUBJECT TO A SECURITY CHECK?** There are circumstances in which limited records checks or an investigation may be conducted on a spouse or cohabitant. National agency checks are conducted on spouses and/or cohabitants of individuals being processed for a TOP SECRET clearance. Additional investigations may be conducted when the spouse or cohabitant is a foreign national.

\*A cohabitant is defined as someone with whom you live together as husband and wife and the relationship involves the mutual assumption of marital rights, duties, and obligations, which are usually manifested by married people, including, but not necessarily dependent on, sexual relations.

**18. WHY WOULD I BE DENIED A SECURITY CLEARANCE?** The Adjudicative Guidelines for Determining Eligibility for Access to Classified Information are used by DoD Central Adjudication Facilities to determine both initial and continued eligibility for access to classified information. The adjudication process is an examination of a sufficient period of a person's life to make an affirmative determination that the person is an acceptable security risk. Eligibility for access to classified information is predicated upon the individual meeting these personnel security guidelines. The adjudication process is the careful weighing of a number of variables known as the whole-person concept. All available, reliable information about the person, past and present, favorable and unfavorable, is considered in reaching a clearance determination. When an individual's life history shows evidence of unreliability or untrustworthiness, questions arise whether the individual can be relied on and trusted to exercise the responsibility necessary for working in a secure environment where protection of classified information is paramount.

**19. WHAT OPTION DO THOSE WHO HAVE A SECURITY CLEARANCE REVOKED OR DENIED HAVE TO REGAIN OR ATTAIN A CLEARANCE?** An individual whose security clearance has been denied or revoked by a central adjudication facility has the opportunity to appeal the decision. The process for doing so differs between military and civilian personnel and contractors. Executive Order 12968, "Access to Classified Information," prescribes the process for military and civilian personnel. Executive Order 10865, "Safeguarding Classified Information Within Industry," outlines the process for contractors.

For contractor personnel, the denial, revocation and appeal process is the responsibility of the Defense Office of Hearings and Appeals (DOHA). The individual may request a hearing before a DOHA administrative judge in order to provide additional, relevant information and will have the opportunity to cross-examine witnesses. Upon completion of the hearing, the administrative judge will render a decision. If the decision is to deny or revoke the security clearance, the individual has the opportunity to appeal the decision to the Appeal Board. The Appeal Board will review the case file and render its decision. This decision is final and concludes the appeal process.

At the conclusion of the appeal process, an individual whose security clearance has been denied or revoked may not reapply for a security clearance for one year from the date of the final decision. The individual may reapply for a security clearance through his or her employing activity if there is a need for access to classified information. The individual is responsible for providing documentation that the circumstances or conditions which resulted in the denial or revocation have been rectified or sufficiently mitigated to warrant reconsideration. The central adjudication facility may accept or reject the reapplication.

**20. HOW OFTEN IS A SECURITY CLEARANCE RENEWED?** An individual is normally subject to periodic reinvestigation at a minimum of every five years for a TOP SECRET level clearance, every 10 years for a SECRET level clearance and every 15 years for a CONFIDENTIAL level clearance.

**21. WHAT CAN CAUSE A DELAY IN THE SECURITY CLEARANCE PROCESS?** The most common areas of delay include the submission of incomplete security application packages, poorly collected fingerprints, and investigations that involve coverage of extensive overseas activities. Individuals can help expedite the process by ensuring they have completed all forms in a thorough and accurate manner; familiarizing themselves with the appearance of a [properly rolled set of fingerprints](#), to ensure they are recorded properly; and when possible, providing stateside references that can verify foreign activities.

## **22. Classified Information non-Disclosure Agreements (SF-312) Guidance**

Individuals issued an initial personnel security clearance (PCL) are required to execute a Classified Information Nondisclosure Agreement (SF-312) prior to being granted access to classified information and the completed form is to be forwarded to the Cognizant Security Agency for retention. The Security Manager or Facility Security Officer (FSO) is responsible for annotating the Joint Personnel Adjudication System (JPAS) with the date the SF-312 was executed and submitting the completed SF-312 to Headquarters Marine Corps (MMSB-20) for military personnel, the Officer of Civilian Human Resources, San Diego for civilian personnel, and the Personnel Security Management Office for Industry (PSMO-I) for retention. The mailing addresses are:

Commandant of the Marine Corps, Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps (MMSB-20), 2008 Elliot Road, Quantico, VA 22134-5030;

Office of Civilian Human Resources, San Diego Operations Center, PO Box 452015, San Diego, CA 92145-2015

Personnel Security Management Office for Industry 600 10th Street, Suite 160 Fort Meade, MD 20755-5136

**23. WHAT CAN I DO TO SPEED THE PROCESS?** A lot of detailed information is required to conduct a background investigation. Information such as complete names, addresses, telephone numbers, and dates of birth for relatives will be required. The form the clearance applicant completes is online and permits information to be gathered even after the process fill out the form (once), complete and submit it. When periodic updates are required, the applicant will only need to update information that has changed since the initial submission. If the applicant would like to preview the type of information that will be required, access the [Questionnaire for National Security Positions \(Standard Form 86\)](#) and begin collecting information so it will be available when needed.

**24. WHERE CAN I GET ASSISTANCE COMPLETING MY SECURITY CLEARANCE PACKAGE OR INQUIRE ABOUT THE STATUS OF MY SECURITY CLEARANCE?** The Security Manager or Facility Security Officer should be the first contact for assistance in completing a security clearance package or to inquire into the status of a security clearance.