

# SECURITY CLEARANCE INVESTIGATIONS



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*Frequently  
Asked Questions*

### *What is the Defense Security Service?*

The Defense Security Service (DSS) is an agency of the Department of Defense. One of our principal missions is to conduct security clearance investigations on individuals affiliated with the Department of Defense who require access to classified or sensitive information.

### *What is a Security Clearance Investigation?*

A security clearance investigation is an inquiry into an individual's loyalty, character, trustworthiness and reliability to ensure that he or she is eligible for access to national security information.

### *Why is a Security Clearance Necessary?*

Security clearance investigations are required in this country, as they are in others, to counter the threats that may stem from the following:

- Foreign intelligence services;
- Those who wish to overthrow or undermine the government by unconstitutional or violent means; terrorist groups; and
- Individuals who
  - may be susceptible to pressure or improper influence;
  - have shown dishonesty or lack of integrity that casts doubt upon their reliability;
  - have demonstrated behavior or are subject to circumstances which may otherwise indicate unreliability.

Conducting security clearance investigations is a key element in protecting the Nation's security.

### *Who is Affected?*

Security clearances may be requested on individuals in the following categories whose employment involves access to sensitive government assets:

- Members of the military;

- Civilian employees working for the Department of Defense or other government agencies;
- Employees of government contractors.

### *How does the Security Clearance Process Work?*

All candidates for a security clearance are asked to complete a security questionnaire, usually the Standard Form 86 (SF 86), which explains the purpose of the security clearance, sets out the government's personnel security policy, and asks for the personal details required to conduct necessary checks.

### *Who Conducts my Security Clearance Investigation?*

The Defense Security Service (DSS) is the agency that will conduct your clearance investigation for the Department of Defense (DoD). Other investigative activities also conduct background investigations for federal government and government contractor employees. The DoD will accept these investigations as the basis for a security clearance if they are current.

### *What is the Investigative Process?*

The security clearance investigation is comprised of one or more of the following:

- A search of investigative files and other records held by federal agencies, including the FBI, and, if appropriate, overseas countries;
- A financial check;
- Field interviews of references (in writing, by telephone, or in person), to include co-workers, employers, personal friends, educators, neighbors, and other individuals, as appropriate;
- Records checks, such as former employers, courts, and rental offices, etc., as appropriate.
- A personal interview with you conducted by an Investigator.

### ***Can You Look at Any Record About Me?***

DSS Investigators can look at certain records without a specific release from you. These records include public records and most employment records. Other records, such as those of individual creditors or medical facilities require specific releases. A DSS Investigator will ask you for the appropriate release(s) if it is necessary to review these types of records.

### ***Why Me?***

You should only be subject to a clearance investigation if you will have access to classified national security information, sensitive government assets, or will be involved with other sensitive duties. If you consider, either now or in the future, that your job does not involve this level of access, you should discuss this with your Security Officer, or when contacted by a DSS Investigator.

### ***What About Unfair Discrimination?***

All candidates for security clearances are treated impartially and consistently, regardless of their gender, race, marital status, age, ethnic origin, religious affiliation or sexual orientation.

### ***Who Decides Whether a Security Clearance Will be Granted?***

An adjudicator, a person trained in the process of reviewing and evaluating security clearance information, reviews the results of your investigation and compares it to established qualifying criteria for access to classified national security information.

### ***What Safeguards are in Place to Ensure Accuracy and Protect My Privacy?***

All DoD and DSS employees involved in the security clearance process, whether Investigators or Adjudicators, must meet the highest standards of integrity and personal conduct. All information received during the course of the investigation is scrupulously protected under the laws and statutes of the United

States, including the Privacy Act of 1974. Additionally, DSS exercises the greatest care to ensure that all information collected during the investigative process is accurate.

### ***What a Long Form! Is it Really Necessary?***

The security questionnaire can look daunting, but you will find that most questions are fairly straightforward and provide security officials with the necessary data relevant to all aspects of your life. You should first read through the instructions and questions to find out what is required, collect the necessary information, and then allow plenty of time for completion. You must answer all questions. Failure to do so may delay the decision about your clearance. If you do not understand a question, please ask for guidance from whomever gave you the form. If you realize *after* you have handed in the form that you have inadvertently made a mistake or omitted something important, please tell your Security Officer or the DSS Investigator when you are interviewed. If you do not do so, the error or omission could be held against you during the adjudicative process.

### ***Who Should I Name as References and What Will They be Asked?***

You should name people who have known you well over a significant period of your life. They will be asked to describe you and your way of life, attitudes, abilities, etc. Essentially, the DSS Investigator will be trying to verify and complete the information provided in your security forms.

### ***Do I have to be Interviewed?***

An interview of the candidate for a security clearance is an integral part of most of the security clearance investigations conducted by the DSS. Your participation is completely voluntary. However, without the interview, DSS will be unable to conduct a complete investigation and adjudicating officials may not be

able to make a determination of your suitability for access to classified or sensitive information. Refusal to cooperate may also result in the denial of a security clearance.

### *What Will I be Asked at the Interview?*

The interview will be wide-ranging and cover most aspects of your life. The objective is to obtain a complete picture of you as an individual to determine whether you will be able to cope with access at the highest levels and not become a security risk. In the event that you consider the information gathered about you to be misleading or inaccurate, the interview will provide you with the opportunity to correct or clarify this information. You should expect to be questioned about your family background, past experiences, health, drinking habits, use of drugs (if any), financial affairs, foreign travel, and so forth. All these questions are asked for a purpose. The DSS Investigator is experienced in conducting these interviews, so it is unlikely that anything you say will cause shock or surprise, and every effort will be made to put you at ease. Be as candid as possible. It is in your interest that the correct decision is reached.

### *I'm Tempted to Keep Quiet About Something in my Past and Hope No One Finds Out.*

Concealing information on security forms or during your interview is viewed very seriously because it is taken as evidence of unreliability and dishonesty. In fact, your clearance could be denied because you withheld information or purposely lied, even though what you were seeking to conceal would not, in itself, have resulted in an unfavorable clearance determination. Furthermore, your clearance could be revoked at a later date if the lie or the concealed information subsequently comes to light. It is simply not worth it.

### *Why Do Some Clearance Investigations Take Longer Than Others?*

Your request for a clearance investigation may be delayed before it gets to DSS because of internal processing requirements of the requester. Incomplete or inaccurate completion of your security forms also delays an investigation. In other cases an investigation takes more time due to special situations such as the need to cover multiple geographic areas, especially overseas locations; difficulty in locating records and people who know you; and, expanding the investigation to clear up discrepancies or issues.

### *What Can I Do to Keep the Clearance Time as Short as Possible?*

You can help DSS complete your investigation as quickly as possible by doing the following:

- **Provide Accurate Information on your Security Forms.** Provide all information required by the forms and follow the instructions.
- **Use the Electronic Personnel Security Questionnaire (EPSQ).** If possible, use the EPSQ rather than a paper form. Using the EPSQ will decrease the processing time for your clearance request because the form is electronically forwarded, rather than mailed. Additionally, the data entered on the form is electronically validated, which prevents delays due to inadvertent errors or omissions. Contact your Security Officer about using the EPSQ, which can be downloaded from the DSS web site @ <http://www.dss.mil>.
- **Be as Specific as Possible.** General entries, such as listing your employment as the U.S. Navy, should be avoided; list your actual duty station(s) and the dates assigned to each location.

- ***Keep DSS Apprised of Changes in Your Duty Location.*** If you expect to transfer from your employment location within 60 days following the completion of your forms, you should enter the location of your next duty station and anticipated arrival date on your security form. Additionally, if you are a candidate for a Top Secret clearance or for access to Sensitive Compartmented Information, you should contact DSS if you are relocating and have not yet been contacted for a personal interview.

#### ***Will I be Told Whether a Clearance Has Been Granted?***

Typically, a favorable investigation and adjudication will result in certain procedures being taken by your organization (for example, security briefings, access badges, etc.). If you are not notified of these types of events, you should contact your Security Officer.

#### ***Can I Appeal A Clearance Denial?***

Yes. If you are notified of an intent to deny or revoke your security clearance, you have the right to appeal this determination. Procedures regarding filing an appeal will be provided to you at that time.

#### ***Who Can I Contact for More Information About the Security Clearance Process?***

If you have any questions concerning the investigative process, the Defense Security Service or its mission, or have any other concerns about your security clearance investigation, you should call the DSS Customer Inquiry Service at 1-888-282-7682. You may also contact your Security Officer, the Local DSS office, or write the Defense Security Service, Office of Public Affairs, 1340 Braddock Place, Alexandria, VA 22314-1651.



Visit the DSS web site @ <http://www.dss.mil>