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THE AEC DECLASSIFICATION PROGRAM

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THE AEC DECLASSIFICATION PROGRAM

June 13, 1972

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THE AEC DECLASSIFICATION PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

It is a pleasure to be here. I have attended three previous seminars, but this is my first time up here on the firing line. My topic is "The AEC Declassification Program." I hope that this report on the things the Atomic Energy Commission and its contractors are doing to reduce the huge inventory of classified documents in our files and vaults will be of interest to you and perhaps generate some ideas which may speed up the general declassification program. I think we are all aware of the pressure from both the public and the administration to get on with the job. I will mention Executive Order 11652, Classification and Declassification of National Security Information and Material, only to state that information classified by law such as AEC Restricted Data is exempt from the provisions of the order. Classification in the AEC complex is based on law. The same law that defines "Restricted Data" and makes it classified also provides means for its declassification by the AEC. When the Commission, the five Commissioners, decides that certain classified information no longer requires protection in the interest of national security, it has the authority to declassify that information. The Atomic Energy Act of 1954 not only provides the means for declassifying information classified as Restricted Data, but requires that the Commission frequently review its files and its classification rules and that it declassify information no longer requiring protection. Under the law, the Commission has the sole authority and responsibility to declassify Restricted Data. Where the DoD has interest, such as weapons use, military or naval reactor development, air craft nuclear propulsion, etc., the declassification decisions are made only with concurrence of the Department of Defense.

There are three basic requirements for conducting a declassification program. They are:

1. Specific and detailed classification guidance.
2. Qualified and authorized reviewers to apply the guidance.
3. A notification system, including manpower to assure that all copies of a declassified document are marked.

Classification Guidance

Most of you are familiar with the DD 254 form as a vehicle for providing classification guidance. The guidance on form DD 254 is normally provided by a program or project manager of a user agency and is based on his determination of what information involved in his program or project should be safeguarded in the interest of national security. The basic policies and criteria on which he makes his determinations are stated in DoD Instruction 5210.47, "Security Classification of Official Information", and in implementations of that instruction. Downgrading and declassification of Defense Information based on an event or on a time schedule may be determined at the time the initial classification is made. The person making the initial classification determination on the DD-254 is normally also responsible for determining how long the information shall remain classified. Some revisions in practice will result from E.O. 11652.

In the AEC, the system is quite different. The Atomic Energy Act of 1954 defined "Restricted Data" as "all data concerning (1) design, manufacture, or utilization of atomic weapons; (2) the production of special nuclear materials or (3) the use of special nuclear material in the production of energy, but shall not include data declassified or removed from the

Restricted Data category pursuant to section 142 of the Atomic Energy Act of 1954." The Atomic Energy Act also provided for special protection of Restricted Data. Thus, all information falling under the definition of Restricted Data is born classified and will remain so until a specific act of the Commission declassifies it and removes it from the Restricted Data category. It is exempted from automatic downgrading and declassification.

This brings us to the AEC system of classification guides. First and most important are the Policy Guides. These are prepared by the AEC Division of Classification following consultations with many specialists and authorities and after much deliberation and considered judgment. These guides must be approved by the Atomic Energy Commission and constitute the basic classification policy. They describe in a general way the information which the Commission has declassified and that which must remain classified. In approving the Policy Guides, the Commission makes the statutory determination that is required to declassify Restricted Data.

Using the approved Policy Guides as bases, the Division of Classification issues several of a second type of guide called Program Classification Guides. These guides provide specific detailed guidance for each of the major technical or production programs or projects, e.g. SNAP devices, nuclear propulsion, military reactors, source and feed material, etc. These guides implement the Policy Guides. They do not require the approval of the Commission.

The third type is called a Local Classification Guide. These are usually issued and controlled by the Classification Officer at a Field Location or AEC Operations Office, although they may be issued by AEC Contractors. The guidance in Local Guides is very detailed and specific for the activities at a given site and is based on the guidance provided by one

or more Program Guides. Local Classification Guides must be approved by the Director of the AEC Division of Classification.

So, in the AEC classification guidance system, we have three levels of guidance: general Policy Guides, detailed Program Guides, and more detailed Local Guides. The guidance in them is all derived from law or direct action by the Commission and the guides are all issued or approved by one authority, the Director of the AEC Division of Classification. The five man commission sets the policy--the Director of the DoC implements it.

Applying the Guidance for Declassification

Now that we have our guidance system installed, how do we apply it for declassifying documents? The AEC Manual 3401 Appendix describes the authority to declassify documents and materials as follows: 1. the Director, Division of Classification, Headquarters and those to whom he may delegate authority are authorized to declassify documents in accordance with Commission approved policies and guides. 2. Directors of Headquarters Divisions and Offices, Field Office Managers and those whom they may designate are authorized to declassify documents and materials generated under the supervision of the particular Division or Office Director or Field Office Manager if the documents disclose only:

- a. information falling wholly within the unclassified topics of the Guide to Unclassified Fields of Research.
- b. information identified as unclassified in an approved Program Guide or Local Guide.
- c. information specifically identified as declassified by the Director of Division of Classification, Headquarters.

- d. information identical with that contained in previously declassified documents.
- e. purely administrative information revealing no technical or programmatic data.

3. When a document is not declassifiable by local authority as listed above, it may be referred to the Division of Classification, Headquarters. What this boils down to then is that only the Director, DoC and those to whom he delegates authority may declassify documents, and then only according to approved classification guide topics. Only the Commission, itself, can declassify information. Those delegated declassification authority can declassify documents only if they contain information determined to be unclassified according to approved guides.

Role of C. O. D.

Declassification efforts of principal AEC contractors are normally directed by a Coordinating Organization Director (C.O.D.). This is a key official appointed by the AEC Assistant General Manager for Administration upon the recommendation of the Director DoC. The C.O.D. is responsible for initiating classification reviews of documents originating within his organization and for preparation of Local Guides, if needed. He maintains direct liaison with the Director, DoC in developing new classification guidance topics relating to his contractor's activities. He is not authorized by virtue of his position as C.O.D. to declassify documents. He does make the initial review and recommends declassification of specific documents.

In addition to the declassification effort at the local level, the AEC has a continuing declassification review program. As additional areas of information are removed from the Restricted Data category by the Commission,

new guide topics are developed to define the action. Reviews of document files are then conducted by declassification review teams who apply the new topics in declassifying documents. The teams are made up primarily of AEC Classification Officers, Responsible Reviewers, and Analysts but may also include AEC contractor classification personnel who are familiar with AEC programs. Yours truly participated in a team review of AEC files at Oak Ridge, Tennessee, where the AEC Technical Information Center and several other AEC and AEC contractor offices are located. During this review which began in September 1971, a million documents were reviewed in an eight-month period. Over 600,000 of these were declassified. This review was on a Go, No-Go basis, i.e. there was no downgrading, no declassification with deletions, and no evaluation for retention. The documents were either declassified as they were or no action was taken. The review team of about 20 men was supervised by two to five members of the DoC staff. Several complete sets of Program Classification Guides and several Local Guides were provided for the reviewers use. The AEC DoC staff members were available for assistance and counseling and made final decisions on declassification where questions arose on the application of the classification guides. The review at Oak Ridge was the first phase of a comprehensive review of the 7.5 million classified documents in AEC controlled files. Reviews are currently being held at the Albuquerque, N. M. offices. It will probably take another two years to complete the AEC-wide review. This will take care of the backlog, then we will proceed from there. Review of classified information will continue after that time. Much document declassification is performed at the local level by AEC Field or Operations Office Classification Officers and Analysts using approved classification guide topics.

AEC Manual Chapter 3402 provides that authority may be granted by Field or Operations Office Managers to AEC contractors to designate qualified personnel approved by that office to declassify documents generated under the supervision of that contractor or for which the contractor has retained custodial or record responsibility. Under recent AEC application of the provision, this authority is being granted to additional AEC contractors. It should help speed up the declassification program.

Notification and Marking

If all classified documents were single copy items, our task would end with the marking of each document as it is declassified. However, there are normally multiple copies and distribution may be rather extensive. Because classified documents generated by AEC and its contractors are given alphanumeric identification numbers (document numbers) when issued, the copies wherever they may be, can be identified and declassification markings applied by the custodian. It is the responsibility of the person who declassifies a document to assure that custodians of all copies and the AEC Declassification Branch are promptly notified. In addition to direct notification to document recipients, the Declassification Branch reports all declassification action to the Technical Information Center (TIC), formerly DTIE, at Oak Ridge. The TIC distributes a bi-monthly report of classified report accessions to all AEC and AEC contractor document transfer-accountability stations. Included in this report is a listing of all declassification actions reported to TIC. The transfer-accountability stations use this listing as their authority to declassify, i.e. mark copies of the declassified documents in their accountability system. Following a comprehensive team review, such as the one at Oak Ridge, a special report listing all declassification action is distributed

to all AEC and AEC contractor transfer-accountability stations. Distributing such a listing for over 1,000,000 documents constitutes a sizable reporting job in itself. This is part of the cost of declassifying documents. Perhaps this is a good time to mention another important aspect of document review -- evaluation of the document, itself. Evaluation is primarily a records management responsibility, but it also has a bearing on the declassification program. We should not have to go to the trouble and expense of declassifying a document if it is of marginal value and might just as well be destroyed as classified scrap. It would seem that the best approach would be a review for retention value or current worth of documents prior to any consideration for declassification review.

Summary

In summary, review of all classified documents for declassification is an enormous undertaking in the AEC and DoD complexes. The systems are different, but the needs and the problems are similar. The most important need is timely, precise, authoritative classification guidance to be applied by reviewers. In the AEC complex, guidance is controlled by a single authority, the Atomic Energy Commission, through its Division of Classification. The second need is qualified reviewers who have authority to declassify documents. If adequate, detailed classification guidance is provided, a reviewer need not be an expert on the subject with which a document deals to declassify it. He must be technically oriented and knowledgeable in the security classification field, but needs only a general knowledge of the subject matter of a document to review it for declassification. The third requirement for a declassification program is a system for notification and marking and the manpower to implement it. This last need may be a major problem with the

current budget squeeze and the order of priorities, but it is essential to completion of the job.

Classification is a national responsibility. Declassification appears to be the order of the day. The AEC and its contractors have begun a concentrated program to carry out the order. Our job is to complete the task. And that Gentlemen (and Ladies) is the AEC Declassification Program.