

## Classification Report: 50% More "Original" Secrets

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The secrets just keep piling up. Despite all the talk of over-classification and the hand-wringing of several commissions, we're classifying more, sealing the information for longer periods, and being pretty sloppy about it. Oh yes, we're also declassifying less.

That's our reading of the report just released by the Information Security Oversight Office.

It cites a 50% increase in "new" secrets, the number of "original classifications" made by agencies, mostly State, Defense and Justice. The 2004 number: 351,150, an increase of 113,016.

Overall, the government made 15.6 million classification "decisions" last year, the report says. That's a ten percent gain in one year and an 81 percent annual increase since 2001.

The classification decisions number includes both "original" designations of Top Secret, Secret or Confidential and "derivative" classifications, which result when information is taken from one of the original classified documents into new material.

The ISOO data suggests that all, and perhaps even more, of the 2004 increase in original classifications came from the Department of Defense. The report also says the military increased its derivative classifications by 86 percent.

It cites 89 "named operations" in Iraq and two more in Afghanistan as the reason for those increases but it offers no numbers on named operations last year for comparison. And it does not present the actual number of original or derivative classifications Defense made last year.

However the "original" classifications number for Defense in 2003 does appear in the text of last year's report – 47,238 – along with a note saying that was a 27% increase. That means the number of documents Defense is originally classifying has more than tripled in two years.

Other interesting notes:

The Department of Homeland Security more than quadrupled its Original Classification Authorities, the people assigned to making original classifications. Its derivative classification rate rose 99%.

The Vice President did not file a report for 2004. His office has two OCAs doing something.

Agencies chose the longer authorized classification period of 10 to 25 years two-thirds of the time. That 40 per cent more often than the historic average.

The rate of declassification was down 34%.

An estimated 260 million pages remain to be reviewed and declassified or exempted under presidential order by the end of 2006. Agencies processed 28 million last year.

ISOO randomly reviewed just over 2,000 documents. It found errors in more than 50 percent. And it could not find a basis for classification in 10 percent.