

records are exempt from subsection (d) of the Act, concerning access to records, the requirements of subsections (f)(2) through (5) of the Act, concerning agency rules for obtaining access to such records, are inapplicable and are exempted to the extent that these systems of records are exempted from subsection (d) of the Act. Although EPA is claiming exemption from the requirements of subsection (f)(2) through (5) of the Act, EPA has promulgated rules which establish Agency procedures because, under certain circumstances, it might be appropriate for an individual to have access to all or a portion of his records in these systems of records. These procedures are described elsewhere in this part.

(11) 5 U.S.C. 552a(g) provides for civil remedies if an agency fails to comply with the requirements concerning access to records under subsections (d)(1) and (3) of the Act; maintenance of records under subsection (e)(5) of the Act; and any other provision of the Act, or any rule promulgated thereunder, in such a way as to have an adverse effect on an individual. Since EPA is claiming that these systems of records are exempt from subsections (c)(3) and (4), (d), (e)(1), (2), (3), (4)(G), (H), and (I), (5), and (8), and (f) of the Act, the provisions of subsection (g) of the Act are inapplicable and are exempted to the extent that these systems of records are exempted from those subsections of the Act.

(f) *Exempt records provided by another agency.* Individuals may not have access to records maintained by the EPA if such records were provided by another Federal agency which has determined by regulation that such records are subject to general exemption under 5 U.S.C. 552a(j). If an individual requests access to such exempt records, EPA will consult with the source agency.

(g) *Exempt records included in a non-exempt system of records.* All records obtained from a system of records that has been determined by regulation to be subject to general exemption under 5 U.S.C. 552a(j) retain their exempt status even if such records are also included in a system of records for which

a general exemption has not been claimed.

[71 FR 234, Jan. 4, 2006, as amended at 83 FR 62718, Dec. 6, 2018; 86 FR 62732, Nov. 12, 2021]

§ 16.12 Specific exemptions.

(a) *Exemption under 5 U.S.C. 552a(k)(2)—(1) Systems of records affected.* (i) EPA–17 OCEFT Criminal Investigative Index and Files.

(ii) EPA–21 External Compliance Program Discrimination Complaint Files.

(iii) EPA–30 OIG Hotline Allegation System.

(iv) EPA–40 Inspector General’s Operation and Reporting (IGOR) System Investigative Files.

(v) EPA–41 Inspector General’s Operation and Reporting (IGOR) System Personnel Security Files.

(vi) EPA–63 eDiscovery Enterprise Tool Suite.

(vii) EPA–79 NEIC Master Tracking System.

(2) *Authority.* Under 5 U.S.C. 552a(k)(2), the head of any Federal agency may by rule exempt any PA system of records within the agency from certain provisions of the Act, if the system of records is investigatory material compiled for law enforcement purposes, other than material within the scope of subsection (j)(2) of the Act. However, if any individual is denied any right, privilege, or benefit that the individual would otherwise be entitled to by Federal law, or for which he or she would otherwise be eligible, as a result of the maintenance of the material, the material must be provided, except to the extent that the disclosure would reveal the identity of a confidential source.

(3) *Qualification for exemption.* All of the affected PA systems of records contain investigatory material compiled for law enforcement purposes, material which is not within the scope of subsection (j)(2) of the Act.

(4) *Scope of exemption.* (i) EPA systems of records 17, 30, 40, 41, 63, and 79 are exempted from the following provisions of the PA, subject to the limitations set forth in 5 U.S.C. 552a(k)(2): 5 U.S.C. 552a(c)(3); (d); (e)(1), (4)(G) and (4)(H); and (f)(2) through (5). EPA system of records 21 is exempt from the following provisions of the PA, subject to the limitations set forth in 5 U.S.C.

552a(k)(2): 5 U.S.C. 552a(c)(3), (d), and (e)(1).

(ii) An individual is “denied any right, privilege, or benefit that he or she would otherwise be entitled by Federal law, or for which he or she would otherwise be eligible, as a result of the maintenance of such material,” only if EPA actually uses the material in denying or proposing to deny such right, privilege, or benefit.

(iii) EPA-17 OCEFT Criminal Investigative Index and Files, EPA-40 Inspector General’s Operation and Reporting (IGOR) System Investigative Files, and EPA-79 NEIC Master Tracking System are exempted under 5 U.S.C. 552a(j)(2), and these systems are exempted under 5 U.S.C. 552a(k)(2) only to the extent that the (j)(2) exemption is held to be invalid.

(5) *Reasons for exemption.* EPA systems of records 17, 21, 30, 40, 41, 63, and 79 are exempted from the provisions of the PA in paragraph (a)(4) of this section for the following reasons:

(i) 5 U.S.C. 552a(c)(3) requires an agency to make the accounting of each disclosure of records available to the individual named in the record at his or her request. These accountings must state the date, nature, and purpose of each disclosure of a record and the name and address of the recipient. Accounting for each disclosure would alert the subjects of an investigation to the existence of the investigation and the fact that they are subjects of the investigation. The release of such information to the subjects of an investigation would provide them with significant information concerning the nature of the investigation, and could seriously impede or compromise the investigation, endanger the physical safety of confidential sources, witnesses, law enforcement personnel and their families, and lead to the improper influencing of witnesses, the destruction of evidence, or the fabrication of testimony.

(ii) 5 U.S.C. 552a(d) requires an agency to permit an individual to gain access to records pertaining to him or her, to request amendment of such records, to request a review of an agency decision not to amend such records, and to contest the information contained in such records. Granting access

to records in these affected PA systems of records could inform the subject of an investigation of an actual or potential criminal violation, of the existence of that investigation, of the nature and scope of the information and evidence obtained as to his or her activities, of the identity of confidential sources, witnesses, and law enforcement personnel, and could provide information to enable the subject to avoid detection or apprehension. Granting access to such information could seriously impede or compromise an investigation, endanger the physical safety of confidential sources, witnesses, law enforcement personnel and their families, lead to the improper influencing of witnesses, the destruction of evidence, or the fabrication of testimony, and disclose investigative techniques and procedures. In addition, granting access to such information could disclose classified, security-sensitive, or confidential business information and could constitute an unwarranted invasion of the personal privacy of others.

(iii) 5 U.S.C. 552a(e)(1) requires each agency to maintain in its records only such information about an individual as is relevant and necessary to accomplish a purpose of the agency required by statute or by Executive order of the President. Maintaining records in this way could impair investigations and law enforcement efforts, because it is not always possible to detect the relevance or necessity of specific information in the early stages of an investigation. The relevance and necessity of maintaining information are often questions of judgment and timing, and it is only after that information is evaluated that its relevance and necessity can be established. In addition, during the course of an investigation, the investigator may obtain information which is incidental to the main purpose of the investigation but which may relate to matters under the investigative jurisdiction of another agency. Such information cannot readily be segregated. Furthermore, during the course of an investigation, the investigator may obtain information concerning the violation of laws other than those within the scope of the agency’s jurisdiction. In the interest of

effective law enforcement, EPA investigators should retain this information, since it can aid in establishing patterns of criminal activity and can provide valuable leads for other law enforcement agencies.

(iv) 5 U.S.C. 552a(e)(4)(G) and (H) require an agency to publish a FEDERAL REGISTER notice concerning its procedures for notifying an individual upon request if the system of records contains a record pertaining to him or her, how the individual can gain access to the record, and how to contest its content. Since EPA is claiming that these systems of records are exempt from subsection (f)(2) through (5) of the Act, concerning agency rules, and subsection (d) of the Act, concerning access to records, these requirements are inapplicable and are exempted to the extent that these systems of records are exempted from subsections (f) and (d) of the Act. Although EPA is claiming exemption from these requirements, EPA has published such a notice concerning its notification, access, and contest procedures because, under certain circumstances, EPA might decide it is appropriate for an individual to have access to all or a portion of his records in these systems of records.

(v) 5 U.S.C. 552a(f)(1) requires an agency to promulgate rules which shall establish procedures whereby an individual can be notified in response to his or her request if any system of records named by the individual contains a record pertaining to him or her. Since EPA is claiming that these systems of records are exempt from subsection (d) of the Act, concerning access to records, the requirements of subsections (f)(2) through (5) of the Act, concerning agency rules for obtaining access to such records, are inapplicable and are exempted to the extent that these systems of records are exempted from subsection (d) of the Act. Although EPA is claiming exemption from the requirements of subsection (f)(2) through (5) of the Act, EPA has promulgated rules which establish Agency procedures because, under certain circumstances, it might be appropriate for an individual to have access to all or a portion of his records in these systems of records.

These procedures are described elsewhere in this part.

(b) *Exemption under 5 U.S.C. 552a(k)(5)—(1) Systems of records affected.* EPA 36 Research Grant, Cooperative Agreement, and Fellowship Application Files.

EPA 40 Inspector General's Operation and Reporting (IGOR) System Investigative Files.

EPA 41 Inspector General's Operation and Reporting (IGOR) System Personnel Security Files.

(2) *Authority.* Under 5 U.S.C. 552a(k)(5), the head of any agency may by rule exempt any system of records within the agency from certain provisions of the PA, if the system of records is investigatory material compiled solely for the purpose of determining suitability, eligibility, or qualifications for Federal civilian employment, Federal contracts, or access to classified information, but only to the extent that the disclosure of such material would reveal the identity of a source who furnished information to the Government under an express promise that the identity of the source would be held in confidence, or, prior to September 27, 1975, under an implied promise that the identity would be held in confidence.

(3) *Qualification for exemption.* These systems contain investigatory material compiled solely for the purpose of determining suitability, eligibility, or qualifications for Federal civilian employment, military service, Federal contracts, or access to classified information.

(4) *Scope of exemption.* (i) EPA 36 is exempted from 5 U.S.C. 552a(c)(3) and (d). EPA 40 and 41 are exempted from the following provisions of the PA, subject to the limitations of 5 U.S.C. 552a(k)(5); 5 U.S.C. 552a(c)(3); (d); (e)(1), (4)(H); and (f)(2) through (5).

(ii) To the extent that records in EPA 40 and 41 reveal a violation or potential violation of law, then an exemption under 5 U.S.C. 552a(k)(2) is also claimed for these records. EPA 40 is also exempt under 5 U.S.C. 552a(j)(2) of the Act.

(5) *Reasons for exemption.* EPA 36, 40, and 41 are exempted from the above provisions of the PA for the following reasons:

(i) 5 U.S.C. 552a(c)(3) requires an agency to make the accounting of each disclosure of records available to the individual named in the record at his or her request. These accountings must state the date, nature, and purpose of each disclosure of a record and the name and address of the recipient. Making such an accounting could cause the identity of a confidential source to be revealed, endangering the physical safety of the confidential source, and could impair the ability of the EPA to compile, in the future, investigatory material for the purpose of determining suitability, eligibility, or qualifications for Federal civilian employment, Federal contracts, or access to classified information.

(ii) 5 U.S.C. 552a(d) requires an agency to permit an individual to gain access to records pertaining to him or her, to request amendment to such records, to request a review of an agency decision not to amend such records, and to contest the information contained in such records. Granting such access could cause the identity of a confidential source to be revealed, endangering the physical safety of the confidential source, and could impair the ability of the EPA to compile, in the future, investigatory material for the purpose of determining suitability, eligibility, or qualifications for Federal civilian employment, Federal contracts, or access to classified information.

(iii) 5 U.S.C. 552a(e)(1) requires each agency to maintain in its records only such information about an individual as is relevant and necessary to accomplish a purpose of the agency required by statute or by Executive order of the President. The application of this provision could impair investigations, because it is not always possible to detect the relevance or necessity of specific information in the early stages of an investigation. Relevance and necessity are often questions of judgment and timing, and it is only after the information is evaluated that the relevance and necessity of such information can be established.

(iv) 5 U.S.C. 552a(e)(4)(H) requires an agency to publish a FEDERAL REGISTER notice concerning its procedures for notifying an individual upon request

how to gain access to any record pertaining to him or her and how to contest its content. Since EPA is claiming that these systems of records are exempt from subsections (f)(2) through (5) of the Act, concerning agency rules, and subsection (b) of the Act, concerning access to records, these requirements are inapplicable and are exempted to the extent that these systems of records are exempted from subsections (f)(2) through (5) and (d) of the Act. Although EPA is claiming exemption from these requirements, EPA has published such a notice concerning its access and contest procedures because, under certain circumstances, EPA might decide it is appropriate for an individual to have access to all or a portion of his records in these systems of records.

(v) 5 U.S.C. 552a(f)(2) through (5) require an agency to promulgate rules for obtaining access to records. Since EPA is claiming that these systems of records are exempt from subsection (d) of the Act, concerning access to records, the requirements of subsections (f)(2) through (5) of the Act, concerning agency rules for obtaining access to such records, are inapplicable and are exempt to the extent that this system of records is exempt from subsection (d) of the Act. Although EPA is claiming exemption from the requirements of subsections (f)(2) through (5) of the Act, EPA has promulgated rules which establish Agency procedures because, under certain circumstances, it might be appropriate for an individual to have access to all or a portion of his records in this system of records. These procedures are described elsewhere in this part.

(c) *Exemption under 5 U.S.C. 552a(k)(1)*—(1) *System of records affected.* EPA 41 Inspector General's Operation and Reporting (IGOR) System Personnel Security Files.

(2) *Authority.* Under 5 U.S.C. 552a(k)(1), the head of any agency may by rule exempt any system of records within the agency from certain provisions of the Privacy Act of 1974, if the system of records is subject to the provisions of 5 U.S.C. 552(b)(1). A system of records is subject to the provisions of 5 U.S.C. 552(b)(1) if it contains records that are specifically authorized under

criteria established by an Executive order to be kept secret in the interest of national defense or foreign policy and are in fact properly classified pursuant to such Executive order.

(3) *Qualification for Exemption.* EPA 41 may contain some records that bear a national defense/foreign policy classification of Confidential, Secret, or Top Secret.

(4) *Scope of exemption.* To the extent that EPA 41 contains records provided by other Federal agencies that are specifically authorized under criteria established by Executive Order to be kept secret in the interest of national defense or foreign policy and are in fact properly classified by other Federal agencies pursuant to that Executive Order, the system of records is exempted from the following provisions of the PA: 5 U.S.C. 552a(c)(3); (d); (e)(1), (4)(G) and (4)(H); and (f)(2) through (5) of the Act.

(5) *Reasons for exemption.* EPA 41 is exempted from the above provisions of the PA for the following reasons:

(i) 5 U.S.C. 552a(c)(3) requires an agency to make the accounting of each disclosure of records available to the individual named in the record at his request. These accountings must state the date, nature, and purpose of each disclosure of a record and the name and address of the recipient. Making such an accounting could result in the release of properly classified information, which would compromise the national defense or disrupt foreign policy.

(ii) 5 U.S.C. 552a(d) requires an agency to permit an individual to gain access to records pertaining to him or her, to request amendment to such records, to request a review of an agency decision not to amend such records, and to contest the information contained in such records. Granting such access could cause the release of properly classified information, which would compromise the national defense or disrupt foreign policy.

(iii) 5 U.S.C. 552a(e)(1) requires each agency to maintain in its records only such information about an individual as is relevant and necessary to accomplish a purpose of the agency required by statute or by Executive order of the President. The application of this provision could impair personnel security

investigations which use properly classified information, because it is not always possible to know the relevance or necessity of specific information in the early stages of an investigation. Relevance and necessity are often questions of judgment and timing, and it is only after the information is evaluated that the relevance and necessity of such information can be established.

(iv) 5 U.S.C. 552a(e)(4) (G) and (H) require an agency to publish a FEDERAL REGISTER notice concerning its procedures for notifying an individual upon request if the system of records contains a record pertaining to him or her, how to gain access to such a record, and how to contest its content. Since EPA is claiming that this system of records is exempt from subsection (f) of the Act, concerning agency rules, and subsection (d) of the Act, concerning access to records, these requirements are inapplicable and are exempted to the extent that this system of records is exempted from subsections (f) and (d) of the Act. Although EPA is claiming exemption from these requirements, EPA has published such a notice concerning its notification, access, and contest procedures because, under certain circumstances, EPA might decide it is appropriate for an individual to have access to all or a portion of his records in this system of records.

(v) 5 U.S.C. 552a(f)(1) requires an agency to promulgate rules which shall establish procedures whereby an individual can be notified in response to his request if any system of records named by the individual contains a record pertaining to him or her. Since EPA is claiming that this system of records is exempt from subsection (d) of the Act, concerning access to records, the requirements of subsections (f)(2) through (5) of the Act, concerning agency rules for obtaining access to such records, are inapplicable and are exempted to the extent that this system of records is exempt from subsection (d) of the Act. Although EPA is claiming exemption from the requirements of subsection (f) of the Act, EPA has promulgated rules which establish Agency procedures because, under certain circumstances, it might be appropriate for an individual to have access to all or a portion of his or

Environmental Protection Agency

§ 17.2

her records in this system of records. These procedures are described elsewhere in this part.

(d) *Exempt records provided by another Federal agency.* Individuals may not have access to records maintained by the EPA if such records were provided by another Federal agency which has determined by regulation that such records are subject to general exemption under 5 U.S.C. 552a(j) or specific exemption under 5 U.S.C. 552a(k). If an individual requests access to such exempt records, EPA will consult with the source agency.

(e) *Exempt records included in a non-exempt system of records.* All records obtained from a system of records which has been determined by regulation to be subject to specific exemption under 5 U.S.C. 552a(k) retain their exempt status even if such records are also included in a system of records for which a specific exemption has not been claimed.

[71 FR 234, Jan. 4, 2006, as amended at 83 FR 62718, Dec. 6, 2018; 86 FR 62732, Nov. 12, 2021]

PART 17—IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EQUAL ACCESS TO JUSTICE ACT IN EPA ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEEDINGS

Subpart A—General Provisions

Sec.

- 17.1 Purpose of these rules.
- 17.2 Definitions.
- 17.3 Proceedings covered.
- 17.4 Applicability to EPA proceedings.
- 17.5 Eligibility of applicants.
- 17.6 Standards for awards.
- 17.7 Allowable fees and other expenses.
- 17.8 Delegation of authority.

Subpart B—Information Required From Applicants

- 17.11 Contents of application.
- 17.12 Net worth exhibit.
- 17.13 Documentation of fees and expenses.
- 17.14 Time for submission of application.

Subpart C—Procedures for Considering Applications

- 17.21 Filing and service of documents.
- 17.22 Answer to application.
- 17.23 Comments by other parties.
- 17.24 Settlement.
- 17.25 Extensions of time and further proceedings.

- 17.26 Decision on application.
- 17.27 Agency review.
- 17.28 Judicial review.
- 17.29 Payment of award.

AUTHORITY: Section 504, Title 5 U.S.C., as amended by sec. 203(a)(1), Equal Access to Justice Act (Title 2 of Pub. L. 96-481, 94 Stat. 2323).

SOURCE: 48 FR 39936, Sept. 2, 1983, unless otherwise noted.

Subpart A—General Provisions

§ 17.1 Purpose of these rules.

These rules are adopted by EPA pursuant to section 504 of title 5 U.S.C., as added by section 203(a)(1) of the Equal Access to Justice Act, Public Law No. 96-481. Under the Act, an eligible party may receive an award for attorney's fees and other expenses when it prevails over EPA in an adversary adjudication before EPA unless EPA's position as a party to the proceeding was substantially justified or special circumstances make an award unjust. The purpose of these rules is to establish procedures for the submission and consideration of applications for awards against EPA when the underlying decision is not reviewed by a court.

§ 17.2 Definitions.

As used in this part:

(a) *The Act* means section 504 of title 5 U.S.C., as amended by section 203(a)(1) of the Equal Access to Justice Act, Public Law No. 96-481.

(b) *Administrator* means the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency.

(c) *Adversary adjudication* means an adjudication required by statute to be held pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 554 in which the position of the United States is represented by counsel or otherwise, but excludes an adjudication for the purpose of granting or renewing a license.

(d) *EPA* means the Environmental Protection Agency, an Agency of the United States.

(e) *Presiding officer* means the official, without regard to whether he is designated as an administrative law judge or a hearing officer or examiner, who presides at the adversary adjudication.

(f) *Proceeding* means an adversary adjudication as defined in § 17.2(b).