

Requests for FBI Data Occupies At Least 500 Workers, \$6.5 Million

By Ed Rogers

United Press International

The search of FBI files for documents requested since 1974 amendments put teeth in the Freedom of Information Act has tied up more than 500 workers and will cost \$6.5 million this fiscal year.

Before the FBI began adding hundreds of workers to the search team last August, it had 9,000 information requests on hand. They were coming in at the rate of 72 a day. The backlog was estimated at 10 million pages of documents.

James M. Powers, head of the search operation, told a House subcommittee last month he expects to catch up by Sept. 1.

Powers said the FBI has assigned 375 workers to the job and is bringing in two groups of more than 100 agents each from FBI offices around the country, each for 11 weeks' work on the backlog.

After the searchers catch up, the 375 workers should keep even with requests, Powers said.

THE FREEDOM of Information Act was passed by Congress to insure more openness in government and allow news media and the public easier access to information. That may not be what has happened.

Jeffrey Axelrad, chief of the information and privacy section, said, "Only a minuscule fraction (of the requests) are by the press, and only a small fraction fall under the umbrella of personal interest."

"The bulk of the litigation under the act is by companies or by persons

being regulated or being chased by the government, or who have some special interest they are trying to pursue," Axelrad said.

Former Deputy Atty. Gen. Laurence Silberman told a Senate subcommittee last week persons being investigated for criminal conspiracies can request FBI files in an attempt to learn who has been informing on them.