

DOT's News Clips Classified Top Secret

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Top-secret stampers at the Department of Transportation (DOT) are working overtime these days, classifying articles they have clipped and distributed internally from such non-secret publications as the Washington Post, The Washington Star-News, The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal.

Each day, specially trained DOT workers scan major dailies and tradepapers for items of interest to their department. These are reprinted and included in special daily news clip sheets, which are passed out for busy DOT executives to read. What they are reading apparently is a secret.

Many other agencies provide similar clipping services of the local and out-of-town press. Defense puts out two or three such publications daily, to about 3,000 officials. Agriculture, Housing and Urban Development and other

agencies also keep their key people informed via the news clip sheets.

DOT's policy, however, is that the department's reading matter is for official and internal use only. The fact that the newspaper articles already have appeared, and been read by millions of people, doesn't alter the department's no-look rule.

Insiders say there may be a reason for the department's reluctance to make the show-and-tell clip sheets public. Some claim that the news stories have been edited, or that obvious items of interest omitted, when they contain embarrassing comments about DOT leaders.

Employees say the word is out that nothing implicating DOT officials with the Watergate affair is to appear in the Daily News Summary, and that items about former Under Secretary Egil Krogh Jr., who has since resigned, were edited free of Watergate links when he was at DOT.

After a long-running check of news sheets put out by other federal agencies, this column could find none that edited news stories, or that even attempted to spare their agencies black eyes they were getting from the press. At-

tempts to get a look at the DOT effort were turned down, on grounds that those newspaper reprints are for official use only.

Defense does the biggest and most professional job of reading the press. It puts out an "early bird" edition, called Current News I, each morning at 8 a.m. This clip sheet of 6 to 8 pages, carries Defense related news stories from East Coast newspapers.

The Monday issue, for instance, had articles from the Post, The New York Times and Christian Science Monitor, some criticizing the Vietnam war, others dealing with NATO news and a Washington Post opinion column called "Abandoning our Vietnam Veterans." Pentagon employees say the news is clipped whether it is "pro" or "anti" department policy.

At noon, the sheet is updated to include articles from afternoon newspapers and a third edition comes out later in the afternoon, with newspaper stories from Mid West and Far West newspapers.

HUD's clip sheet, at least until recently, has embarrassed some political appointees because of the catholic reading tastes of its compilers. It regularly reproduced news-

paper stories about housing scandals that involved HUD officials, with no apparent attempt to decide which news was fit to reprint.

A recent offering of the Agriculture Department clip sheet had news articles ranging from such publications as The Wall Street Journal and The Des Moines Register, to an editorial from The Medford (Okla.) Patriot-Star about food prices.

National Archives has been told not to talk to the press on any subject. General Services Administration, the parent agency, has directed Archives employees and officials that "the following standard reply must be given" when nosy newsmen ask questions:

"All press inquiries are handled by GSA's press office. Their number is 343-4511."

GSA Administrator Arthur Sampson reportedly had to be scraped off the ceiling because of a Washington Post story Sunday concerning tax breaks given President Nixon as a result of his donating personal papers to the Archives. The tax breaks came about at a time when Congress was trying to tighten up certain tax loopholes, and GSA officials fear the news leak came from the Archives.