

800 Ask to Review Their U.S. Dossiers

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More than 800 persons have written to the FBI, the CIA and the Internal Revenue Service in the last month, swamping those agencies—often identified with domestic intelligence operations—with requests for information that was once locked in secret files.

Most of them, according to officials who have watched the letters come in, want to know if the government has been keeping a file on them and what's in it. The FBI, a spokesman said yesterday, opens a file on each letter writer, if a file does not already exist, after independently checking the writer's identity.

The spokesman said the new files were opened to keep a record of the bureau's action in response to letter requests, and the check made to ensure that one person's file does not go to someone else with the same name.

In the first month's test of the amendments made last year to the Freedom of Information Act, letter requests are running at dou-

ble last year's rate at the IRS and at more than double the rate at the FBI. At the CIA, a spokesman said yesterday, 383 requests were received from Feb. 20 to March 19. Only 96 requests had been received there in all of January and half of February.

"We have spent 80 percent of our time on that since Feb. 19," a CIA official said, apparently only partly in jest.

The reason behind the flood of new letters seeking from personal files to voluminous policy studies is the amended Freedom of Information Act, which came into effect on Feb. 19. The amendments, passed by an overwhelming margin over President Ford's veto last November, severely limited the bureaucracy's ability to dodge requests for information that is legally supposed to be available to the public.

As the amendments came into effect, new offices were opened all over Washington to handle the flood of freedom of information requests. At CIA headquarters, a spokesman said, 35 people have been set to

work full time handling requests where a few worked part-time before.

Six persons now work full time at the IRS, handling freedom of information requests within the service's disclosure division. The staff of the FBI's freedom of information act unit has been tripled since 1973. James Farrington, speaking for the unit yesterday, said that because 209 letters have arrived in March alone, they have fallen behind the 10 days allowed by the act to answer requests.

"Prior to this onslaught, we could handle the requests within the time limits," Farrington said.

Farrington said the FBI faces serious problems complying with the amended act's requirement that investigatory files be disclosed without revealing confidential sources of information in them. That exception was written into one of last year's amendments to the original Freedom of Information Act, which has been on the books since 1967.

Since February, the investigatory agencies have received the largest number

of requests for information, but requests have gone as well to the Department of Defense—where 10 new jobs were created in a new freedom of information section at the Pentagon—the State Department and other government agencies.

Some of the letter writers have been individuals such as Mitchell Rogovin, a local attorney who served in the Justice Department in the Johnson administration. He asked the FBI for his personal file and was turned down, primarily on the basis that he is now representing the Institute for Policy Studies in a suit of the FBI for other records.

There also have been requests by organizations. Morton Halperin fired off 17 letters on the first day the amendments were law. Under a program of the American Center for National Security Studies, a Washington-based group, Halperin is seeking parts of the Pentagon Papers from the Defense Department, the background to strategic arms limitation agreements from the State Department, and, among other things, all the

CIA files on its domestic activities.

Although agencies have been responding quickly, only a trickle of new information has come out in the first month of the new rules. Bureaucrats handling requests seemed clearly aware that one of the amendments to the Freedom of Information Act specifically made court proceedings and actions for unwilling officials possible.

"I have a little litany now: Thou shalt not be arbitrary or capricious," said one government spokesman. "That's the wording of the act."