

MAR 9 1972

Nixon Moves to Reduce Secrecy

SFChronicle *Washington Post Service*

Washington

President Nixon instituted a new system yesterday designed to restrict the use of top secret and secret stamps on government documents and to speed up the process whereby classified documents are made public.

The President said he was adopting new rules on the classification and declassification of papers "to lift the veil of secrecy which now enshrouds altogether too many papers" written by federal employees.

Although officials conceded that it may be some time before anyone can be sure

the new rules will make more information available, some of it almost certainly will be made public faster than under the present system.

He took no action to strengthen the penalties against espionage or to propose legislation similar to the British Official Secrets Act to provide greater safeguards against divulgence of government secrets.

STUDY

More than a year ago — before the publication of the Pentagon Papers — the President ordered a thorough study of rules governing classification and declassification of documents.

An interdepartmental committee conducted the study and also examined the problem of espionage, regulations governing use of secret material by unauthorized persons, by defense contractors and advisory groups such as the Rand Corp. These issues are still under study.

The executive order the President signed yesterday revises the many complex rules that have governed classification and declassification procedures.

The new rules become:
See Back Page

From Page 1

effective after June 1.

They will reduce the number of departments and agencies authorized to classify documents up to the "top secret" category from 24 to 12 and the number of individuals authorized to classify a document "top secret" from 5100 to about 1860.

CLASSIFICATION

Materials may be classified top secret, secret or confidential only if their unauthorized disclosure "could reasonably be expected" to cause damage to the national security.

Timetables of from six to ten years will be set for the automatic declassification of documents, with some exceptions.

Any document exempted from automatic declassification will be subject to mandatory review after a ten-year period.

If information is still classified after 30 years it will

be automatically declassified unless the head of the originating agency directs in writing that it remain classified.

Officials who over-classify a document will be penalized.

DOWNGRADING

Unless specifically exempted, all documents classified "top secret" will be down graded to "secret" after two years, to "confidential" after two more years and declassified after a total of ten years.

"Secret" information is to be downgraded to "confidential" after two years and declassified after a total of eight years.

"Confidential" documents are to be declassified after six years.

Since the Pentagon Papers were based on documents of varying age — most of them less than six years old — most would not have been declassified if the new rules had been in effect.