

FBI's Efforts to Answer Its Mail

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The FBI, besieged by thousands of citizens who want to know what the bureau has in its files about them, will summon 400 agents here this summer, in an effort to eliminate a backlog of Freedom of Information requests.

In a statement yesterday that made reference to "an avalanche" of paper work, "massive waves" of requests, and a "multimillion dollar effort" to answer the queries, FBI Director Clarence M. Kelley said that two task forces of 200 agents each will be assembled here from across the nation to deal with the matter.

Kelley said that the project will cost about \$6.5 million, will last six months, and is only a part of an overall effort that is expected to cost at least \$11.6 million this fiscal year.

Several bureau sources said privately that the heads of many of the FBI field offices across the country are upset about the project not because of the cost, but because of the requirement that all 400 agents be lawyers.

There are only about 1200

lawyers among the 8500 agents. One source said, "The SACs (Special Agents in Charge of field offices) are not happy to lose their lawyers for so long a time."

In his own statement, Kelley dropped several hints that the project might hinder the bureau's crime-fighting functions. "Aside from the cost factor, we cannot ignore the fact that by diverting these field agents from their normal duties, we will be losing about 85 man-years in investigative effort," he said.

Several staff members of congressional oversight committees were quick to challenge this, although privately, saying that FBI officials had implied in the past that much of the work needed to estimate the backlog could be done by agents who had been involved in domestic security work in the past.

Because of tight new guidelines imposed on the bureau's domestic security operations, the Justice Department has estimated that 395 agent and 237 clerical work-years formerly used for such investigation could be eliminated or freed for other activities.

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