

**U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC)  
Freedom of Information Backlog Reduction Plan  
(Pursuant to Executive Order 13,392)**

The CPSC's Backlog of FOIA Requests at the end of Fiscal Year 2005 was 112 and as of July 9, 2008 the Backlog was 307. In 2007 and 2008, the CPSC experienced an increase in FOIA requests from various sectors of the public due to an increase in toy recalls. In order to develop a viable backlog reduction plan, the CPSC's FOIA office reviewed all aspects of our processing of FOIA requests. Areas reviewed include:

- 1) features of the FOIA office newly acquired electronic processing application (FOIAXpress);
- 2) lag time from receipt of the request to when it is logged into the system, assigned a tracking number and forwarded to the appropriate program office for file searching;
- 3) the allotted time for program offices to submit responsive information to the FOIA office;
- 4) assignment of requests to FOI Paralegal Specialists for processing; and
- 5) staff resources for processing FOIA requests.

We also considered the impact due to the fact that the CPSC is required to process FOIA requests in conjunction with applicable provisions of the Consumer Product Safety Act and related Commission regulations.

After careful reviews of the FOIA activities, processes and resources, we have prepared the following backlog reduction plan goals.

**I. Automated FOIA Tracking System and Backlog Reduction**

In January 2008, the FOIA office implemented an electronic FOIA processing application (FOIAXpress) and new document scanning procedures. As a result, the Commission's entire FOIA process is completely automated, from receipt of the request to completion. Requests are forwarded electronically to the program offices and responsive information is submitted to the FOIA office electronically as well. Acclimation to the automated system by the users (learning process) temporarily and significantly slowed down our processing, thereby creating an increase in the backlog. After completion of initial and follow-up training for all staff affected by the new tracking system, everyone involved with usage of the new system is proficiently utilizing the system as intended. In addition to being more efficient, the automated system also provides accountability for all FOIA requests processed because it maintains an activity

log which describes all actions and individuals involved with the processing of a request. The automated system allows for quicker and easier retrieval of previously processed information for future requests for the same information.

FOIAXpress requests received by the FOIA office are logged, assigned a request number or tracking number and electronically forwarded to the appropriate program office for file searching within a few minutes of receipt. Currently, the time allotted to the program offices to provide responsive information to the FOIA office is 10 working days. We plan to reduce the allotted time to 7 working days. This will ensure faster processing of requests.

We anticipate that the upgrade in processing the Commission's FOIA requests will reduce the backlog to 200 by December 31, 2008.

## **II. Staff Resources and Training**

As of June 2008, staff resources for processing FOIA requests were 6 full time equivalents (FTEs). We have since hired two additional FOI Paralegal Specialists, increasing the staff resources to 8 FTEs, with one more pending position currently in the applicant review phase. Paralegal Specialists are required to work on a specified number of assigned cases within a specified period. Thus, having additional staff is will alleviate the number of pending requests at any given time. Ongoing customer service training continues for the staff to assist requesters to clarify their FOIA requests so that they can be processed faster.

## **III. Procurement of Scanning Equipment for FOI Paralegal Specialist**

Staff has allocated funds for the purchase of more desktop scanners and other computer equipment for all FOI Paralegal Specialist to enable quicker and easier updates of FOIA requests.

## **IV. Focus on Oldest Requests**

FOIA office staff is focusing its efforts on the oldest requests. Most of these requests have been compiled and are in other Commission offices for review. The FOIA office will urge these offices to complete their review in a timely fashion for prompt release and completion of the requests.