



U.S. CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON, DC 20207

ADMINISTRATION OF THE  
FREEDOM OF INFORMATION  
ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 1998

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FEBRUARY 1, 1999

Report for Fiscal Year 1998  
The Administration of  
The Freedom of Information Act

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**I. BASIC INFORMATION REGARDING THE REPORT**

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- A. Contact for questions about the report: Todd A. Stevenson, Freedom of Information Officer and Deputy Secretary, Office of the Secretary, U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, Washington, D.C. 20207 or 4340 East-West Highway, Site 502, Bethesda, Maryland 20814. Telephone: 301-504-0785, Facsimile: 301-504-0127, Email: [tstevenson@cpsc.gov](mailto:tstevenson@cpsc.gov)
  
- B. Web address for this report: <http://www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/pubs/reports/foia98.pdf>
  
- C. A paper copy of the report is available from Mr. Stevenson.

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**II. HOW TO MAKE A FOIA REQUEST**

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- A. All FOIA requests received by the CPSC are processed in headquarters. The address is: Freedom of Information Act Request, Office of the Secretary, U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, Washington, D.C. 20207, or for hand deliveries: 4340 East-West Highway, Suite 502, Bethesda, Maryland 20814. Telephone: 301-504-0785, Facsimile: 301-504-0127, Email: [tstevenson@cpsc.gov](mailto:tstevenson@cpsc.gov)
  
- B. Other Reference Information about the Agency: The CPSC's World Wide Web site, [www.cpsc.gov](http://www.cpsc.gov), contains extensive information about the agency's activities, including agency meetings, product recalls and hazards, job vacancies, publications, a calendar of public meetings, other important activities and the Guide to Public Information. The site also includes an interactive feature that allows consumers to report unsafe products and related injuries electronically. CPSC also maintains an electronic mail address: [info@cpsc.gov](mailto:info@cpsc.gov). This can be used for inquiries about product recalls or to report potential product hazards. The CPSC's public reference reading room contains numerous agency records, including the materials the CPSC makes available for public inspection and copying pursuant to the FOIA, 5 U.S.C. §§ 552(a)(2) and (5). The reading room

is in the Public Information Center in Suite 419 at the CPSC's headquarters at 4330 East-West Highway, Bethesda, Maryland 20814. Those reading room records are also available on the CPSC's electronic reading room on CPSC's World Wide Web site, [www.cpsc.gov](http://www.cpsc.gov), in the FOIA portions of the "Library" section.

- C. Response Time Ranges: The CPSC responds within 7 days to most of the FOIA requests that are received. These are simple requests for materials that are frequently requested or where we have anticipated the subject of the requests. More complex requests require additional preparation and processing time. The median time to complete the complex requests is 30 days. Complex requests involve one of the following: voluminous records or records which are not easily accessible and have to be collected from several Commission offices; proprietary data; privacy concerns; part of an investigatory file; or review required by section 6(b) of the Consumer Product Safety Act (CPSA), 15 U.S.C. § 2055(b).<sup>1</sup> The Commission reviews all agency records that are responsive to FOIA requests according to the requirements of section 6(b). These notifications and the extensive analyses they require are in addition to procedures routinely conducted pursuant to the FOIA. The process not only involves the staffs of the Offices of the Secretary and the General Counsel, but also frequently involves other technical staffs where their expertise is required for an understanding of the materials being processed. The time-consuming reviews and material preparations of FOIA requests involving section 6(b) caused delays in the processing of these requests.
- D. The CPSC generally does not disclose to the public the following types of information:
1. Documents prohibited from disclosure by the CPSA, 15 U.S.C. §§ 2055(a) and (b), which prohibits the release of: trade secrets and confidential commercial or financial information; and information that identifies manufacturers of consumer products, unless the CPSC has taken reasonable steps to assure it is accurate, its release would be fair under the circumstances, and its release is reasonably related to effectuating the purposes of the acts the Commission administers.
  2. Information that identifies injured persons and the persons who treated them, without their consent.
  3. Certain inter-agency and intra-agency memoranda containing opinions and recommendations prepared to assist in decision-making.

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<sup>1</sup> On June 9, 1980, the U. S. Supreme Court ruled that section 6(b) of the CPSA applies to FOIA requests, CPSC v. GTE Sylvania, 447 U.S. 102 (1980). Section 6(b) requires that, with certain exceptions, the Commission notify manufacturers or private labelers of consumer products before disclosing information from which their identities can be readily ascertained by the public. Section 6(b) prohibits the disclosure of information earlier than 30 days after notification to identified firms to allow the firms to make claims and comments. Firms must be given 10 days to file suit to block the disclosure if they claim that the information is confidential or inaccurate. Efforts to satisfy the statutory requirements in the CPSA necessarily delay many responses to FOIA requests.

4. Personnel, medical and similar files, the disclosure of which would be a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy.
5. Investigatory records compiled for law enforcement purposes when disclosure could reasonably be expected to interfere with enforcement procedures or would disclose techniques, guidelines and procedures for law enforcement investigations or prosecutions.

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### **III. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS AND ACRONYMS USED IN THE REPORT**

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- A. Agency-Specific Acronyms or Other Terms.
  1. CPSA • the Consumer Product Safety Act . 15 U.S.C. §§ 2051-2084.
  2. CPSC or Commission • Consumer Product Safety Commission.
  3. Section 6(a) of the CPSA, 15 U.S.C. § 2055(a) • prohibits the disclosure of trade secrets, confidential or proprietary business information or other matters referred to in 18 U.S.C. § 1905 or FOIA Exemption 4; requires notification to submitters of information prior to disclosure of any potential confidential information.
  4. Section 6(b) of the CPSA, 15 U.S.C. § 2055(b) • prohibits the disclosure of information from which the identity of a manufacturer or private labeler of a consumer product can be readily ascertained by the public, earlier than 30 days after notification of the manufacturer or private labeler; requires the Commission to take reasonable steps to assure, prior to disclosure, that the information to be disclosed is accurate, that the disclosure is fair in the circumstances and that disclosure is reasonably related to effectuating the purposes of the statutes that the Commission administers; requires the Commission to notify a firm 10 days prior to disclosure of information that the firm claims is inaccurate, but for which the Commission believes it has complied with the requirements of section 6(b)(1).
  5. Section 15(b) submissions • Section 15(b) of the CPSA, 15 U.S.C. § 2064(b), requires manufacturers, distributors or retailers of consumer products to notify the Commission of certain hazardous products.

- B. Basic Terms, expressed in common terminology.
1. FOIA/Privacy Act Request • Freedom of Information Act request. A FOIA request is a request for access to records concerning a third party, an organization, or a particular topic of interest. A Privacy Act request is a request for records concerning oneself; such requests are also treated as FOIA requests. All requests for access to records, regardless of which law is cited by a requester, are included in this report.
  2. Initial Request • a request to a federal agency for access to records under the Freedom of Information Act.
  3. Appeal • a request to a federal agency asking that it review at a higher administrative level an initial full denial or partial denial of access to records under the Freedom of Information Act, or any other FOIA determination, such as, a matter pertaining to fees.
  4. Processed Request or Appeal • a request or appeal for which an agency has taken a final action on the request or the appeal.
  5. Multi-track Processing • a system in which simple requests requiring relatively minimal review are placed in one processing track and more voluminous and complex requests are placed in one or more other tracks. Requests in each track are processed on a first-in/first-out basis. A requester who has an urgent or compelling need for records may request expedited processing.
  6. Expedited Processing • an agency will process a FOIA request on a expedited basis when a requester has shown an exceptional need to urgency for the records which warrants prioritization of his or her request over other requests that were made earlier.
  7. Simple Request • a FOIA request that an agency using multi-track processing places in its fastest (non-expedited) track based on the volume or simplicity of records requested.
  8. Complex Request • a FOIA request that an agency using multi-track processing places in a slower track based on the volume, availability and complexity of records requested.
  9. Granted Request • an agency decision to disclose all records in full in response to a FOIA request.
  10. Partially Granted Request • an agency decision to disclose a record in part in response to a FOIA request, deleting information determined to be exempt under one or more of the FOIA's exemptions; or a decision to disclose some records in their entireties, but to withhold others in whole or in part.
  11. Denial or Full Denial • an agency decision to not release any part of a record or records in response to a FOIA request, because all the

information in the requested records is determined by the agency to be exempt under one or more the FOIA's exemptions, or for some procedural reason, such as, because no record is located in response to a FOIA request.

12. Time Limits • the time period in the FOIA for an agency to respond to a FOIA request (ordinarily 20 working days from proper receipt of a "perfected" FOIA request).
13. Perfected Request • a FOIA request for records which adequately describes the records sought, which has been received by the FOIA office of the agency or agency component in possession of the records, and for which there is no remaining question about the payment of applicable fees.
14. Exemption 3 statute • a separate federal statute prohibiting the disclosure of a certain type of information and authorizing its withholding under FOIA Exemption 3, 5 U.S.C. § 552(b)(3).
15. Median Number • the middle, not the average number.
16. Average Number • the number obtained by dividing the sum of a group of numbers by the quantity of numbers in the group.

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#### **IV. EXEMPTION 3 STATUTES**

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- A. Section 6(a)(2) of the Consumer Product Safety Act, 15 U.S.C. § 2055(a)(2).
  1. This section was applied in denials of the disclosure of information containing or relating to trade secrets or other matters referred to in 18 U.S.C. § 1905, or subject to FOIA Exemption 4. The denials involved requests for information pertaining to Commission inspections of firms, Commission files on possible product hazards under section 15 of the CPSA, and other Commission files containing submitted proprietary data. Deletions were made of information submitted by firms being investigated and determined to be proprietary or confidential, consisting of sales volumes or other financial totals, manufacturing processes, formulas, supplier and dealer identities, pricing and distribution information, testing conducted by firms, and technical and engineering specifications.
  2. During the fiscal year, no court ruled on the application of Section 6(a)(2) to FOIA denials.

- B. Section 6(b)(1) of the CPSA, 15 U.S.C. § 2055(b)(1).
1. This section was applied in denials of information and after it was determined that the accuracy of the information was uncorroborated by an investigation by the Commission or other independent evaluation, or the information was not otherwise confirmed, or the disclosure would not be fair in the circumstances or would not effectuate the purposes of the acts the Commission administers. Such information included unconfirmed consumer complaints and reported incidents, and information provided by firms during negotiations for the settlement of compliance matters.
  2. During the fiscal year, no court ruled on the application of Section 6(b)(1) to FOIA denials.
- C. Section 6(b)(5) of the CPSA, 15 U.S.C. § 2055(b)(5).
1. This section was applied in denials of information submitted by firms under section 15(b) of the CPSA, unless the Commission issued a complaint against the firm, the Commission accepted in writing a remedial settlement agreement, or the firm agreed to the disclosure.
  2. During the fiscal year, no court ruled on the application of Section 6(b)(5) to FOIA denials.
- D. Section 6(e)(1) of the CPSA, 15 U.S.C. § 2055(e)(1).
1. This section was applied to withhold information submitted by manufacturers where their products were the subject of civil court actions involving deaths or grievous bodily injuries, as required by Section 37 or the CPSA, 15 U.S.C. § 2084.
  2. During the fiscal year, no court ruled on the application of Section 6(e)(1) to FOIA denials.
- E. Section 25(c) of the CPSA, 15 U.S.C. § 2074 (c).
1. This section was applied to the portions of reported incidents, consumer complaints or investigative materials identifying injured parties and persons treating the injured parties without their consent to the disclosure.
  2. During the fiscal year, no court ruled on the application of Section 25(c) to FOIA denials.

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**V. INITIAL FOIA/PA ACCESS REQUESTS**

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A. Numbers of Initial Requests.

1. Number of requests pending at end of fiscal year 1997 • 249
2. Number of requests received during fiscal year 1998 • 13,457
3. Number of requests processed during fiscal year 1998 • 13,467
4. Number of requests pending at end of fiscal year 1998 • 239

B. Disposition of Initial Requests.

1. Number of total grants • 12,586
2. Number of partial grants • 470
3. Number of denials • 86
  - a. Number of times each FOIA exemption used (counting each exemption once per request).
    - (1) Exemption 1 • 0
    - (2) Exemption 2 • 0
    - (3) Exemption 3 • 351
    - (4) Exemption 4 • 134
    - (5) Exemption 5 • 204
    - (6) Exemption 6 • 10
    - (7) Exemption 7(A) • 71
    - (8) Exemption 7(B) • 0
    - (9) Exemption 7(C) • 1
    - (10) Exemption 7(D) • 11
    - (11) Exemption 7(E) • 100
    - (12) Exemption 7(F) • 0

- (13) Exemption 8 • 0
- (14) Exemption 9 • 0
- b. Other reasons for nondisclosure (total) • 696
  - (1) No records • 208
  - (2) Referrals • 432
  - (3) Request withdrawn • 37
  - (4) Fee-related reason • 20
  - (5) Records not reasonably described • 37
  - (6) Not a proper FOIA request for some other reason • 0
  - (7) Not an agency record • 0
  - (8) Duplicate request • 40

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**VI. APPEAL OF INITIAL DENIALS OF FOIA/PA REQUESTS**

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- A. Numbers of Appeals.
  - 1. Number of appeals received during fiscal year 1998 • 43
  - 2. Number of appeals processed during fiscal year 1998 • 43
- B. Disposition of Appeals.
  - 1. Number completely upheld • 32
  - 2. Number partially reversed • 6
  - 3. Number completely reversed • 0
  - b. Number of times each FOIA exemption used (counting each exemption once per appeal).
    - (1) Exemption 1 • 0
    - (2) Exemption 2 • 0

(3)	Exemption 3	• 29
(4)	Exemption 4	• 16
(5)	Exemption 5	• 21
(6)	Exemption 6	• 0
(7)	Exemption 7(A)	• 7
(8)	Exemption 7(B)	• 0
(9)	Exemption 7(C)	• 0
(10)	Exemption 7(D)	• 0
(11)	Exemption 7(E)	• 12
(12)	Exemption 7(F)	• 0
(13)	Exemption 8	• 0
(14)	Exemption 9	• 0
b.	Other reasons for nondisclosure (total)	• 5
(1)	No records	• 0
(2)	Referrals	• 0
(3)	Request withdrawn	• 1
(4)	Fee-related reason	• 0
(5)	Records not reasonably described	• 0
(6)	Not a proper FOIA request for some other reason	• 0
(7)	Not an agency record	• 0
(8)	Duplicate request	• 0
(9)	Records released after appeal received	• 3
(10)	Reconsidered withholdings and released records	• 1

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**VII. COMPLIANCE WITH TIME LIMITS / STATUS OF PENDING REQUESTS**

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A. Median Processing Time for Requests Processed During Fiscal Year 1998.

1. Simple Requests.

- a. Number of requests processed • 12,672
- b. Median number of days to process • 7 days

2. Complex Requests.

- a. Number of requests processed • 795
- b. Median number of days to process • 30 days

3. Requests Accorded Expedited Processing.

- a. Number of requests processed • 0
- b. Median number of days to process • Not Applicable

B. Status of Pending Requests (for Each Multiple Track).

- 1. Number of requests pending at end of fiscal year 1998 • 239
- 3. Median number of days that such requests were pending as of that date • 60

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**VIII. COMPARISONS WITH PREVIOUS YEARS**

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A. Comparison of Numbers of Requests Received •

Fiscal Year 1997	Fiscal Year 1998	Number of Change	Percentage of Change
10,506 requests	13,457 requests	+1,951 requests	+18.6

B. Comparison of Numbers of Requests Processed •

Fiscal Year 1997	Fiscal Year 1998	Number of Change	Percentage of Change
10,622 requests	13,467 requests	+2,845	+26.8

- C. Comparison of Median Numbers of Days Requests Were Pending as of End of Fiscal Year 1998 • The CPSC did not maintain this information for any previous time period.
- D. Other Statistics Significant to Agency • Numbers of Notifications Under the CPSA and Other Responses Made to Fulfill FOIA Requests.
1. Section 6(b)(1) notifications made to manufacturers or private labelers or consumer products to inform them of the proposed disclosure of information that identifies their products and allow them to comment on the disclosure • 913
  2. Section 6(b)(2) notifications made to manufacturers or private labelers to inform them 10 days prior to disclosure of information that the firms had claimed was inaccurate or unfair to release, but for which the Commission believes it has complied with the requirements of section 6(b)(1) and has overruled the comments or claims made by the firm • 227
  3. Instances where section 6(b)(1) applied to requested materials and upon completion of notifications and other requirements of sections 6(b)(1) and 6(b)(2), the Commission disclosed materials • 1,300
  4. Section 6(a)(3) notifications made to submitters of information to the Commission prior to disclosure of any potential confidential information • 242
  5. Section 6(a)(5) notifications made to submitters of information 10 days prior to the intended disclosure, where the Commission had overruled any firm claims of proprietary or confidential business information • 82
- E. Other Agency Efforts to Improve Timeliness of FOIA Performance and to Make Records Available to the Public • The CPSC has increased its activities to make more available to the public the records of interest, by expanding the placement of records on its World Wide Web site ( [www.cpsc.gov](http://www.cpsc.gov) ). The CPSC's Web site had 3,800,000 visitors during fiscal year 1998, including 12,075 visitors to the FOIA Electronic Reading Room. The information sought included records regarding the Commission's regulatory and compliance activities, documents filed in adjudicatory proceedings, Commission decisions, press releases, safety alerts, publications, the Public Calendar of meetings and briefings, briefing materials on matters before the Commission, advisory opinions of the General Counsel, materials requested under the FOIA by more than one requester, contracting activities, job vacancies, and many other matters.

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**IX. COSTS / FOIA STAFFING**

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A. Staffing Levels.

1. Number of full-time FOIA personnel • 8
2. Number of personnel with part-time or occasional FOIA duties (in total work-years) • 9
3. Total number of personnel (in work years) • 17

B. Total Costs (Including Staff and All Resources).

1. FOIA processing (including appeals) • \$1,262,500
2. Litigation-related activities (estimated) • \$46,700
3. Total costs • \$1,309,200
4. Comparison with previous years (including percentage of change) • Specific cost estimates for FOIA processing and litigation-related activities were not maintained for previous years. However, staffs involved in these FOIA-related activities have not changed substantially from the previous few years.

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**X. FEES**

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A. Total Amount of Fees Collected by Agency for Processing Requests • \$17,079.66

B. Percentage of Total Costs • 1.3 % of Total Costs

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**XI. FOIA REGULATIONS (INCLUDING FEE SCHEDULE)**

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- A. Title 16, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 1015 – Procedures for Disclosures or Production of Information under the FOIA, which includes the fee schedule, is electronically located at: <http://www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/pubs/reports/16cfr1015.pdf> . A paper copy is attached.
  
- B. Title 16, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 1101 – Information Disclosure under the Consumer Product Safety Act is electronically located at: <http://www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/pubs/reports/6b1101.pdf> . A paper copy is attached.

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**XII. ATTACHMENT -**

**Title 16, Code of Federal Regulations:  
Part 1015 - Procedures for Disclosure or Production of  
Information under the Freedom of Information Act**

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**XIII. ATTACHMENT -**

**Title 16, Code of Federal Regulations: Part 1101 –  
Information Disclosure under Section 6(b) of the  
Consumer Product Safety Act**

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