



Introducing the Government Security Classifications

Core briefing for 3rd Party Suppliers

Summary

The UK government is changing the way that it classifies and protects its information. From 2 April 2014, it will adopt a simpler approach of three levels of security classification: OFFICIAL, SECRET and TOP SECRET.

Why is the classification system changing?

Government requires robust and effective security processes to protect information and other assets. The current Government Protective Marking Scheme (UNCLASSIFIED, RESTRICTED, CONFIDENTIAL, SECRET and TOP SECRET) has been in place for decades. Although the core requirements of protecting information have not changed, many of the supporting processes were developed for a paper-based system and are now complex, poorly understood and unsuited to the modern workplace.

How does the new system work?

Security classifications indicate the sensitivity of information and the need to defend against a broad profile of threats to it. Each classification will attract a level of security controls appropriate for managing the information risks involved.

OFFICIAL

The majority of information that is created or processed by the public sector. This includes routine business operations and services, some of which could have damaging consequences if lost, stolen or published in the media, but are not subject to a heightened risk profile.

SECRET

Very sensitive information that justifies heightened protective measures to defend against determined and highly capable threat actors. For example, where compromise could seriously damage military capabilities, international relations or the investigation of serious organised crime.

TOP SECRET

HMG's most sensitive information requiring the highest levels of protection from the most serious threats. For example, where compromise could cause widespread loss of life or else threaten the security or economic wellbeing of the country or friendly nations.

- All HMG information has value and requires a basic level of protection
- There is no direct mapping from the old marking system to the new classifications.
- Individuals are personally responsible (and accountable) for exercising good judgement and providing meaningful advice when sharing sensitive information.

Key points

The **OFFICIAL** classification covers up to 90% of Public Sector business, including most policy development, service delivery, legal advice, personal data, contracts, statistics, case files, and administrative data.

- Security controls at OFFICIAL are based on good, commercially available products, in the same way that the best-run businesses manage their sensitive information.
- Particularly sensitive OFFICIAL information will be controlled through local handling arrangements that reinforce the 'need to know' principle.

The **SECRET** classification concentrates security resources on particularly sensitive defence, diplomatic and other assets that require protection against heightened threats. Whilst IT solutions may be bespoke overall, the aim is to reuse very good commercial products as far as possible.

The **TOP SECRET** classification will continue to provide extremely high levels of protection for exceptionally sensitive assets. Very little change is anticipated to current Top Secret standards and procedures.

Who does it apply to?

All central government departments and agencies, the Armed Forces and HMG's external partners should apply the new classifications from go live. We anticipate adoption across the wider Public Sector to follow in time. A system of equivalencies and handling arrangements will be established with international partners.

What does this mean for existing suppliers and contracts?

This policy change has implications for new and existing contracts with third party suppliers. Industry partners were consulted throughout the policy development.

All new tenders should be to the new approach from October 2013. Departments are required to assess their legacy contracts on a case by case basis, adopting a measured and pragmatic approach to transition to minimise contract changes outside of business cycles. Suppliers should contact their Contracting Authority for further details about how this will be managed in their specific context.

Where can I find more information?

The new policy, controls framework and related guidance have been published on the Gov.UK website. A range of training and communications materials are also available, including an introductory film, eLearning, and template posters, leaflets and desk aids. Further guidance and FAQs will be published in due course.

Questions about this change should be put to Departmental Contract Managers in the first instance. General comments or questions may be sent to: classifications@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk

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