"Marking" Makes Sense: How to Properly Mark and Safeguard Classified Information Through Derivative Classification

Ensuring classified and sensitive information is properly marked with appropriate classification and control markings serves to warn and inform holders of the degree of protection required. The initial decision about what information should be classified is called **ORIGINAL CLASSIFICATION**. Because this is a very important and sensitive decision, the Government has granted only a limited number of government officials the authority to perform original classification. **DERIVATIVE CLASSIFICATION** is the process by which classification and control markings are transferred from one properly marked source document to newly created products. Markings transferred during derivative classification aid in maintaining proper safeguards, facilitate downgrading or declassification, and aid in the security classification review process. All cleared personnel who access, generate, or create material from classified sources are considered *DERIVATIVE CLASSIFIERS*.

It is crucial that all classified information and material be marked to clearly and accurately convey: (1) the level of classification assigned, (2) the portions that contain or reveal classified information, (3) the period of time protection is required, and (4) any other notations required for protection of the information.

Guidelines for the classification, marking, and declassification of national security information are found in the President's Executive Order 13526, "Classified National Security Information" and Chapter 4 of the National Industrial Security Program Operating Manual (32 CFR 117). Employees should be knowledgeable and practice proper marking procedures when preparing classified documents.

The first step in the derivative classification process is to confirm that you are referencing a proper *SOURCE DOCUMENT*.
There are only three authorized sources for classified information:
· Security Classification Guides (SCG)
· Properly Marked Source Documents
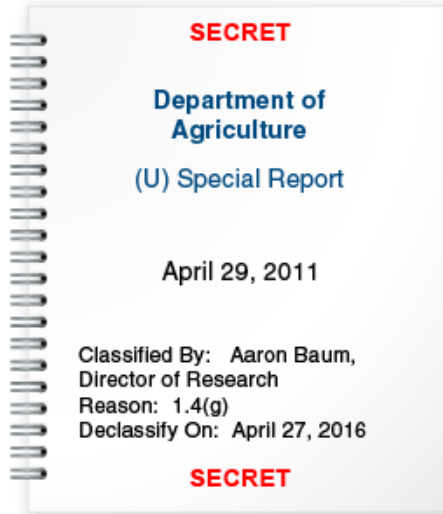· Department of Defense (DD) Form 254 (for Contractors).

The following are **NOT AUTHORIZED** sources of classification guidance:
☒ **Memory:** "I remember that project was classified Secret 5 years ago, so it must be Secret now."
☒ **Unconfirmed source:** "Someone told me this document can be declassified."
☒ **Just because:** "I am going to classify this document Top Secret because that is how we have always done it."
☒ **Media/Internet:** "I saw it on the news last night so it must be declassified."
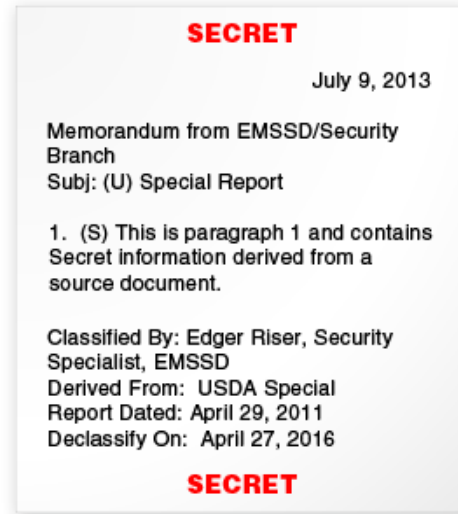
The next step in the marking process is to identify the classification level of each portion of the created document and mark the portions accordingly. A *PORTION* is ordinarily defined as a paragraph, but may consist of charts, tables, pictures, and illustrations, as well as subjects and titles. Common portion markings are the letters "U" for UNCLASSIFIED, "C" for CONFIDENTIAL, "S" for SECRET, and "TS" for TOP SECRET. In addition, control and distribution markings such as "U/ITAR" for UNCLASSIFIED International Traffic in Arms Regulations or "S//REL" for SECRET Releasable Only To ___, and so on are used to provide supplemental distribution guidance. These abbreviations in parenthesis are usually placed before the portion to which they apply (see Figure 1 and Figure 2).

Source Document

SECRET

Department of Agriculture

(U) Special Report

April 29, 2011

Classified By: Aaron Baum, Director of Research
Reason: 1.4(g)
Declassify On: April 27, 2016

SECRET

New Document

SECRET

July 9, 2013

Memorandum from EMSSD/Security Branch
Subj: (U) Special Report

1. (S) This is paragraph 1 and contains Secret information derived from a source document.

Classified By: Edger Riser, Security Specialist, EMSSD
Derived From: USDA Special Report Dated: April 29, 2011
Declassify On: April 27, 2016

SECRET

The third step is to determine the overall classification of the created document. The *OVERALL CLASSIFICATION* is the highest classification level of information contained in the document. The overall classification must be conspicuously marked at the top and bottom of the page on the newly created document. If the document contains more than one page, the overall marking must be placed at the top and bottom of each page including the front and back cover pages.

The fourth step is to ensure the contents of the *CLASSIFICATION AUTHORITY BLOCK* are accurately completed by referencing the source document(s). This block is a text box usually found on the bottom first page of the classified document. For documents of *Original Classification*, the box usually contains information identifying: (1) the person that the document was "Classified by," (2) the national security "Reason" for which the information was classified, and, if available, (3) instructions for when the document should be "Declassified" or "Downgraded." Similarly, the classification authority block for documents of derivative classification should identify (1) the person that the document was "Classified by," (2) source document from which the information was "Derived from", and, if available, (3) instructions for when the document should be "Declassified" or "Downgraded." If the newly created document was generated based on multiple classified sources, the "Derived from" line should indicate "Multiple

Sources" and a list of the sources must be provided on a separate page. If the source document itself is marked "Multiple Sources," the classification box for the new document should specifically identify the source document by author, date, and subject on the "Derived from" line.

The last essential marking indicates the *DURATION OF THE CLASSIFICATION* (Declassify On/Downgrade To). If "Declassification on/Downgrade to" information is provided in the source document, this information should be transferred directly to the newly created document. If there are multiple sources with different declassification dates, the latest declassification date should be indicated in the classification authority block of the new document. If you encounter a document with a declassification date that has already passed, DO NOT ASSUME IT HAS BEEN DECLASSIFIED. Declassification is a formal process by which the information owner declares that a document no longer needs to be classified in the interests of national security. Until that process is completed, the document must be protected at the highest level of classification marked.

The Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency (DCSA) requires all cleared persons to complete an *Initial Derivative Classification Training* and a *Refresher Training* every year thereafter. Derivative classification training is available in two ways: In-person training at the Academies or online through DCSA. For more information about derivative classification, visit
https://securityawareness.usalearning.gov/derivative/i