



OFFICE OF
INSPECTOR GENERAL
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

VIA EMAIL

December 4, 2019

Maraya Cornell
MuckRock News
DEPT MR 79838
411A Highland Ave
Somerville, MA 02144-2516

Re: OIG-2020-00002

Dear Maraya Cornell:

This is in response to your Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request dated October 2, 2019, which was received by the Office of Inspector General (OIG) on the same date. You requested the following information under the FOIA, 5 U.S.C. § 552: all complaints, tips, and reports of suspected theft or fraud the Office of Inspector General has received from BLM Petroleum Engineering Technicians from the beginning of fiscal year 2014 until the date this request is processed.

In your October 2, 2019, FOIA request you requested a fee waiver which was granted. Therefore, in this case, no fee has been assessed.

We obtained the documents you seek and conducted a review of the material you requested. After reviewing this information, we have determined that we may release 4 pages of responsive documents, with FOIA redactions, pursuant to exemptions 5 U.S.C. § 552(b)(4), (b)(7)(C), and (b)(7)(D).

FOIA requires that agencies generally disclose records. Agencies may only withhold requested records only if one or more of nine exemptions apply.

The file contains commercial and financial business information that arguably may be protected under Exemption 4. Specifically, the file includes company information and specific financial information. Exemption 4 protects “trade secrets and commercial or financial information obtained from a person [that is] privileged or confidential.” 5 U.S.C. § 552(b)(4). This exemption is intended to protect two categories of information in agency records: (1) trade secrets; and (2) certain confidential or privileged commercial information. Where there is a reasonable expectation that release of information could cause substantial commercial or competitive harm, we are required by Executive Order 12,600 to contact the submitter before releasing the information. We must allow the submitter to provide its views regarding public disclosure of this information. If we undertook this procedure in your case, it would delay this decision further and likely would not result in the release of any

additional relevant information. Consequently, in order to process your request as promptly as possible, we are withholding this material pursuant to Exemption 4. If you are interested in obtaining this commercial information, please contact us, and we will process it in accordance with Executive Order 12,600 and DOI regulations.

Exemption 7 allows agencies to refuse to disclose records compiled for law enforcement purposes under any one of six circumstances (identified as exemptions 7 (A) through 7 (F)). Law enforcement within the meaning of Exemption 7 includes enforcement pursuant to both civil and criminal statutes.

Specifically, Exemption 7(C) permits an agency to withhold information contained in files compiled for law enforcement purposes if production “could reasonably be expected to constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy.” U.S.C. § 552 (b)(7)(C). Thus, the purpose of Exemption 7(C) is to protect the privacy interest of an individual if one exists. To determine this we must evaluate not only the nature of the personal information found in the records, but also whether release of that information to the general public could affect that individual adversely. We find that release of personal information withheld here reasonably could be expected to have a negative impact on an individual’s privacy. Even if a privacy interest exists, we must nevertheless disclose the requested information if the public interest outweighs the privacy interest in the information requested. You have not established that release of the privacy information of witnesses, interviewee, middle and low ranking federal employees and investigators, and other individuals name in the investigatory file, would shed light on government operations, and we have not found such a public interest in this case. For this reason, after reviewing the information in question, we have determined that disclosure would be an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy and we must withhold this information under FOIA Exemption 7(C).

Furthermore, FOIA Exemption 7(D) exempts from disclosure records or information compiled for law enforcement purposes which could reasonably be expected to disclose the identity of a confidential source. In this instance we have determined that releasing these documents could reasonably be expected to disclose the identity of confidential sources who provided information under circumstances from which an assurance of confidentiality could be reasonably inferred. Because enforcement of the law depends upon information elicited from these vulnerable sources, they must be protected in order to further effective law enforcement. For this reason, we are withholding information that may identify confidential sources.

We reasonably foresee that disclosure would harm an interest protected by one or more of the nine exemptions to the FOIA’s general rule of disclosure.

If you disagree with this response, you may appeal this response to the OIG’s FOIA/Privacy Act Appeals Officer. If you choose to appeal, the FOIA/Privacy Act Appeals Officer must receive your FOIA appeal **no later than 90 workdays** from the date of this letter. Appeals arriving or delivered after 5 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday, will be deemed received on the next workday.

Your appeal must be made in writing. You may submit your appeal and accompanying materials to the OIG FOIA/Privacy Act Appeals Officer by mail, courier service, fax, or email. All communications concerning your appeal should be clearly marked with the words: "FREEDOM OF INFORMATION APPEAL." You must include an explanation of why you believe the OIG's response is in error. You must also include with your appeal copies of all correspondence between you and the OIG concerning your FOIA request, including your original FOIA request and the OIG's response. Failure to include with your appeal all correspondence between you and the OIG will result in the Department's rejection of your appeal, unless the FOIA/Privacy Act Appeals Officer determines (in the FOIA/Privacy Act Appeals Officer's sole discretion) that good cause exists to accept the defective appeal.

Please include your name and daytime telephone number (or the name and telephone number of an appropriate contact), email address and fax number (if available) in case the FOIA/Privacy Act Appeals Officer needs additional information or clarification of your appeal. The OIG FOIA/Privacy Act Appeals Office Contact Information is the following:

Office of Inspector General
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C, Street, N.W.
MS-4428
Washington, D.C. 20240
Attn: FOIA/Privacy Act Appeals Office
Telephone: (202) 208-6742
Fax: (202) 219-1944
Email: foia@doioig.gov

For your information, Congress excluded three discrete categories of law enforcement and national security records from the requirements of FOIA. *See* [5 U.S.C. 552\(c\)](#). This response is limited to those records that are subject to the requirements of FOIA. This is a standard notification that is given to all our requesters and should not be taken as an indication that excluded records do, or do not, exist.

The 2007 FOIA amendments created the Office of Government Information Services (OGIS) to offer mediation services to resolve disputes between FOIA requesters and Federal agencies as a non-exclusive alternative to litigation. Using OGIS services does not affect your right to pursue litigation. You may contact OGIS in any of the following ways:

Office of Government Information Services
National Archives and Records Administration
8601 Adelphi Road - OGIS
College Park, MD 20740-6001
E-mail: ogis@nara.gov
Web: <https://ogis.archives.gov>

Telephone: 202-741-5770
Facsimile: 202-741-5769
Toll-free: 1-877-684-6448

Please note that using OGIS services does not affect the timing of filing an appeal with the OIG FOIA & Privacy Act Appeals Officer.

However, should you need to contact me, my telephone number is (202) 208-66464 and the email is foia@doioig.gov.

Sincerely,

Mildred H. Washington

Mildred H. Washington
Government Information Specialist