

The National Security Archive

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March 8, 2007

Via Facsimile

Carmen Suro-Bredie,
USTR Chief FOIA Officer;
Freedom of Information Office
Office of the U.S. Trade Representative
600 17th Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20508.

Dear Ms. Suro-Bredie:

We are writing to give you advance notice of our findings about the U.S. Trade Representative's FOIA performance. We have just completed the National Security Archive's fifth government-wide audit, "The Knight Open Government Survey."

As part of our ongoing efforts to ensure agency compliance with the FOIA, the Archive recently audited nearly 150 government agency and component Web sites to assess whether they had implemented the 1996 E-FOIA Amendments. The audit included the FOIA Web sites of all 91 agencies subject to FOIA and 58 agency components that received more than 500 FOIA requests in fiscal year 2005. The Web site reviews were completed at the end of February 2007.

Our reviewers followed a standardized methodology to assess each site. They examined whether the sites included required records in their electronic reading rooms and whether the sites provided mandatory guidance materials and other essential information for FOIA requesters. Our report, including our specific findings for each agency, will be released March 11, 2007, and will be available on our Web site at www.nsarchive.org.

Our audit identified the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative as one of the worst agencies with regard to E-FOIA compliance. We found several areas where your FOIA Web site fails to fulfill both the letter and the spirit of the 1996 E-FOIA Amendments. Specifically:

- There is no link to your FOIA Web site from the USTR home page. Yours is one of only 5% of federal agencies that do not have a FOIA link on their home page.
- The Documents Library contains no required FOIA documents. In order to access the required documents, the requester needs to conduct an "Advanced Search" and sift through the results. The required documents, or links to the documents, should be easily accessible from your FOIA site.
- Guidance on how to file a FOIA request is scattered over several pages and documents on the site. Your FOIA guidance should be provided in one document that is easily accessible from the main FOIA page.

An Independent non-governmental research institute and library located at the George Washington University, the Archive collects and publishes declassified documents obtained through the Freedom of Information Act. Publication royalties and tax deductible contributions through The National Security Archive Fund, Inc. underwrite the Archive's Budget.

We hope that you will take this opportunity to review your agency's FOIA Web site and make improvements that will bring your agency in line with Congress's vision when it passed the E-FOIA amendments ten years ago. Please do not hesitate to contact us to discuss your FOIA Web site or any questions you may have regarding our audit.

Sincerely,

Thomas S. Blanton
Executive Director

Meredith Fuchs
General Counsel