

Sept. 4, 2009

DSS Digest



DISCO launches CATS - new adjudication tracking system

The Defense Industrial Security Clearance Office (DISCO) is responsible, on behalf of DoD and 23 other departments and agencies, for determining the facility and personnel clearance (FCL and PCL) eligibility of contractors and their employees for access to classified information.

On Aug. 24, 2009, DISCO launched a new adjudication tracking system, the U.S. Army's Clearance Adjudication Tracking System, known as CATS. In a memorandum from the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence on April 10, 2009, CATS was designated the DoD non-intelligence community information technology system for case management and adjudications. DSS has been working with the Business Transformation Agency (BTA), the Army and the CATS developer, Microsoft, to modify CATS to provide the functionality needed to process industry clearances.

DISCO expects to see immediate benefits from CATS and the electronic receipt of cases. Electronic delivery of cases will reduce the personnel clearance eligibility process time as reports of investigation (ROI) will now be sent electronically to DISCO from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) rather than by hard copy. It currently takes 10 to 15 days for DISCO to receive paper copies of the ROIs from OPM. With CATS, this should be reduced by four to seven days.

On Nov. 5, 2008, the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence authorized the use of electronic adjudication (eADJ) in DoD central adjudication facilities (CAFs). CATS will provide this capability for DoD. At this time only Secret clearances, which are based on National Agency Checks with Local Agency Checks (NACL) and Credit Check investigations, will be considered for eADJ. The eADJ solution electronically reviews cases delivered via eDelivery by OPM to CATS and checks specified data points against a set of DoD adjudication business rules to determine if the cases are sufficiently clean to render an automatic adjudication. Only cases that pass all checks performed are adjudicated, while those failing one or more checks are moved forward for auto-assignment to an adjudicator along with other cases. The goals of eADJ are to both render automatic adjudication of clean cases as soon as the case is received at the CAF and to reduce the case load going to human adjudicators to only those cases requiring careful human review. Work is in progress within DoD to expand the business rules to include other case types. Based on sampling by the Army CAF for their cases, DSS anticipates that over 20 percent of secret clearances will be automatically issued upon receipt of the ROI. Upon passing all checks, the clearance eligibility would be automatically granted and JPAS updated.

Another benefit of electronic adjudication is a reduction in man-hour costs associated with tracking and processing cases manually in the current paper-based environment. Electronic adjudication of secret clearances also allows adjudicators to spend more time on difficult cases or on clearance maintenance actions instead of having to meticulously check otherwise simple investigations.

With CATS implementation, the Facility Security Officer should see little difference as DISCO will still enter eligibility determinations in the Joint Personnel Adjudication System (JPAS). However, for a temporary period, for almost all DISCO adjudications, two entries will be reflected for the same decision. This is a workaround to enable eligibility change notifications to be generated. Once this process is automated, DISCO will no longer be required to manually record a second decision to generate the notification.

Language from the FY09 DoD budget submission:

Use of "the Clearance Adjudication Tracking System (CATS) will reduce adjudicative case management timelines, improve document accountability, standardize the adjudicative automation infrastructure, and improve efficiency data collection to support improvement of the adjudication process."

DISCO by the Numbers

1,000,000+ - Number of cleared personnel under the NISP

20 - Number of days for DISCO IRTPA timeline for Collateral Adjudications

13 - Number of adjudicative guidelines used to evaluate clearance eligibility

2 - Average number of days it takes to grant an interim secret clearance (if an individual is eligible) once clearance process has been received at DISCO