



CO (08) 1

# Cabinet Office Circular

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## **Intended for:**

All Ministers  
All Chief Executives  
All Senior Private Secretaries  
All Private Secretaries  
All Public Sector staff handling Cabinet material

## **Security Classification System: Application to Cabinet Documents**

### **Summary of key points**

- This circular updates the Cabinet Office's guidance on the application of the security classification system to Cabinet material (Cabinet and Cabinet committee agendas, papers, minutes and memos).
- All departments, Ministers' offices and other government agencies should ensure that Cabinet material is securely handled and managed in accordance with the guidelines contained in the Security in the Government Sector manual.
- It is the responsibility of the agency preparing a Cabinet paper to determine the level of security classification applicable to the paper from the draft stage. The minimum security classification for Cabinet papers is **In Confidence** and papers should be marked with this classification. Higher security classifications should be used if appropriate.
- Cabinet has agreed to the use of a new security endorsement of **Special Handling Required** to provide additional protection for government information of a highly sensitive nature in the public interest/personal privacy area. This endorsement, together with the **Sensitive** classification, should be used for Cabinet papers dealing with such material.

## Introduction

- 1 This circular updates the guidance on the application of the security classification system (including the new endorsement of **Special Handling Required**) to Cabinet material. It supersedes the previous Cabinet Office circular on this subject [CO (01) 10]. The updated guidance contained in this circular will be included in the Cabinet Office *CabGuide* in due course.
- 2 Chief Executives and Senior Private Secretaries are asked to ensure that:
  - all staff involved in the handling of Cabinet material or preparation of Cabinet papers are familiar with the advice in this circular;
  - the content of this circular is conveyed to all Crown entities or other government agencies for which their Minister is responsible, which are involved in the preparation of Cabinet papers or handling of Cabinet material.

## Security classification system

- 3 The security classification system for protecting official information is set out in the [Security in the Government Sector](#) manual (SIGS). The system has two categories of classification covering:
  - information requiring protection for public interest or personal privacy reasons;
  - information requiring protection for national security reasons.
- 4 A summary of the classifications is set out in the table below. Full details are provided in [Chapter 3](#) of SIGS.

<b>Security Classifications</b> <a href="http://www.security.govt.nz/sigs/html/chapter3.html">[http://www.security.govt.nz/sigs/html/chapter3.html]</a>	
<b>Information requiring protection for public interest or personal privacy reasons</b>	
Sensitive	Compromise of information would be likely to damage the interests of the New Zealand government or endanger the safety of its citizens
In Confidence	Compromise of information would be likely to prejudice the maintenance of law and order, impede the effective conduct of government in New Zealand or affect adversely the privacy of its citizens
<b>Information requiring protection for national security reasons (ie New Zealand's security, defence, or international relations)</b>	
Top Secret	Compromise of information would damage national interests in an exceptionally grave manner
Secret	Compromise of information would damage national interests in a serious manner
Confidential	Compromise of information would damage national interests in a significant manner
Restricted	Compromise of information would damage national interests in an adverse manner

- 5 The classifications most commonly used for Cabinet material are **In Confidence**, **Sensitive** and **Restricted**. The classifications of **Confidential**, and occasionally **Secret** and **Top Secret**, may also be used for Cabinet material when required.

6 Classifications in themselves do not allow official information to be withheld under the Official Information Act 1982. All requests under the Official Information Act must be considered using the criteria in the Act regardless of the classification given to the document concerned.

## **Endorsements**

7 Endorsements may also be used with security classifications to describe the nature of the information being protected or to indicate certain handling requirements. Examples of common endorsements used for Cabinet papers are:

- **Budget:** proposed or actual measures for the Budget prior to their announcement
- **Commercial:** sensitive commercial processes, negotiations or affairs
- **Staff:** reference to named or identifiable individuals.

8 These endorsements, when used with a security classification, result in the following examples of classifications and endorsements commonly used for Cabinet papers:

- |                                |                                    |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| • <b>Budget: Sensitive</b>     | • <b>Commercial: In Confidence</b> |
| • <b>Commercial: Sensitive</b> | • <b>Staff: In Confidence</b>      |

9 Cabinet papers may also occasionally be personally addressed to Ministers and chief executives due to the sensitivity of the material. Such papers are marked **Personal to:** followed by the name of the recipient. Cabinet papers marked as **Personal to:** are intended to be seen by the addressee only.

10 Cabinet papers containing legal advice should be marked **Legal Privilege** together with an appropriate security classification.

## **New endorsement: Special Handling Required**

11 Cabinet has approved a new endorsement of **Special Handling Required** for use with the **Sensitive** classification for highly sensitive material in the public interest/personal privacy area that requires additional protection. Detailed criteria and handling requirements for the endorsement were issued to all departments with the Cabinet minute [CAB Min (07) 28/1A]. The guidelines are also available in a new Annex H of Chapter 3 of the SIGS [<http://www.dpmc.govt.nz/dpmc/publications/special-handling-required-091007.html>].

12 It is envisaged that the new endorsement will be used for a very limited range of material, such as special projects involving highly sensitive policy proposals or negotiations. The endorsement should be used only when it is considered that the highly sensitive nature of the material requires additional protection to that provided by the **Sensitive** classification.

13 The endorsement should only be used with the **Sensitive** classification. Cabinet papers requiring the use of the endorsement should be classified **Special Handling Required: Sensitive**. Such papers will be distributed by the Cabinet Office in envelopes to Ministers' offices and departments. The papers should be seen only by staff authorised to access such material. When not in use, the papers must be kept in a security container that meets the minimum requirements for storing material classified as **Confidential**.

## Application of classifications to Cabinet papers

- 14 It is the responsibility of the agency preparing a Cabinet paper to determine the level of classification applicable to the paper to ensure that it receives the appropriate level of protection at all stages.
- 15 The minimum classification for Cabinet papers is **In Confidence** and papers should be marked with this classification. Higher classifications should be used if appropriate.
- 16 If a paper is submitted for Cabinet without a classification or with a classification that does not appear to be appropriate for the nature of information contained in the paper, the Cabinet Office will assign an appropriate classification in consultation with the relevant Minister's office.

## Guidelines for secure handling of Cabinet material

- 17 The Cabinet Office's guidelines on the secure handling of Cabinet material are provided on the Cabinet and Committee workspace on the Public Service Intranet [<https://psi.govt.nz/cabinet/Library/Cabinet%20Office%20guidance%20on%20secure%20handling%20of%20Cabinet%20material.pdf>]. A summary of the key points is provided in this section.
- 18 All Cabinet material is classified official information. This applies to all environments and technologies in which the material is saved, stored, used and transmitted.
- 19 Cabinet material should be made available only to those with a "need to know". Ministers' offices, departments and other government agencies handling Cabinet material are responsible for ensuring that the material is securely handled and managed in accordance with the protective security principles and guidelines for the protection of classified information contained in SIGS [<http://www.security.govt.nz/sigs/html/index.html>].
- 20 The attached Annex provides a summary guide to the handling, storage and transmission requirements for Cabinet material, in accordance with SIGS. These requirements apply to Cabinet papers at the draft and final stages. Key points to note are:
  - the Cabinet Office delivers Cabinet material by hand to Ministers' offices, in envelopes if required. Ministers' offices are responsible for ensuring the Cabinet material is conveyed securely to their Ministers' departments or other government agencies. Papers must be enveloped if being delivered by messenger or courier;
  - Cabinet papers with a classification up to **Sensitive** or **Restricted** may be transmitted electronically between government agencies using SEEmail or approved equivalent;
  - Cabinet papers with an **In Confidence** classification may be sent by fax within New Zealand, if necessary. Appropriate administrative safeguards should be used to ensure that the intended recipient receives the submission and it is handled securely;
  - all Cabinet documents should be kept in secure lockable storage when not in use;

- Cabinet documents classified as **Special Handling Required: Sensitive** or **Confidential** or higher level must be transmitted in accordance with SIGS requirements and kept in an approved security container which complies with the requirements of the Protective Security Manual issued by the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service.
- 21 Ministers' offices are also reminded that Cabinet documents sent to a Minister outside the parliamentary complex, by VIP Transport or a courier, must be placed in an approved lockable bag.

### Further information

- 22 Further information on the protective security principles and the classification system is provided in SIGS. [<http://www.security.govt.nz/sigs/html/index.html>]. For further information about the application of the classifications and the protection of official information, staff should in the first instance contact their departmental security officer.
- 23 Advice on the classification and secure handling of Cabinet material is also provided in the Cabinet Office's *CabGuide* [<http://www.cabguide.cabinetoffice.govt.nz/context/writing-papers/security-classifications>]. The Cabinet Office Registrar, Margaret Stacey (phone: 471 9758; email: [margaret.stacey@dpmc.govt.nz](mailto:margaret.stacey@dpmc.govt.nz)), can also be contacted for further advice.

Secretary of the Cabinet

## Guide to Handling and Transmission Requirements for Cabinet Material

This table provides a summary guide to the main handling and transmission requirements for Cabinet material (Cabinet and Cabinet committee agendas, papers, minutes and memos). Full details of the handling, transmission and disposal requirements for classified material are provided in the Security in the Government Sector manual, <http://www.security.govt.nz/sigs/html/index.html>.

The Cabinet Office delivers all Cabinet material by hand to Ministers' offices. Papers for Ministers and departments are distributed in envelopes when required. Ministers' offices are responsible for ensuring that Cabinet material is conveyed securely to their Minister's departments (or other government agencies). All Cabinet material must be kept in secure storage when not in use.

### Classifications/Endorsements for Public Interest and Personal Privacy Reasons

Classification/ Endorsement	Manual Transmission	Manual Storage	Electronic Transmission	Electronic Storage
<b>Special Handling Required: Sensitive</b>	Cabinet Office delivers papers to Ministers' offices: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• double enveloped for Ministers</li> <li>• double enveloped for departments</li> </ul>	Keep in approved security container when not in use.	Must be marked <b>Special Handling Required: Sensitive</b> . May be transmitted by SEEmail or approved equivalent, only to persons authorised to receive the information.	Electronic files must be protected against illicit internal use or intrusion by external parties. Access must be restricted to those who need to know and who are cleared to access the information.
<b>Sensitive Including:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Budget: Sensitive</b></li> <li>• <b>Commercial: Sensitive</b></li> <li>• <b>Negotiations: Sensitive</b></li> </ul>	Cabinet Office delivers papers to Ministers' offices: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• unenveloped for Ministers</li> <li>• enveloped for departments</li> </ul>	Keep in secure storage when not in use.	Must be marked <b>Sensitive</b> . May be transmitted electronically by SEEmail or approved equivalent.	Electronic files must be protected against illicit internal use or intrusion by external parties.
<b>In Confidence</b> Including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Commercial: In Confidence</b></li> <li>• <b>Staff: In Confidence</b></li> <li>• <b>Legal Privilege: In Confidence</b></li> </ul>	Cabinet Office delivers papers to Ministers' offices: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• unenveloped for Ministers</li> <li>• unenveloped for departments</li> </ul>	Keep in secure storage when not in use.	Must be marked <b>In Confidence</b> . May be transmitted electronically by SEEmail or approved equivalent. Subject to risk assessment, may be transmitted electronically without being encrypted. May be sent by fax within New Zealand, if necessary.	Electronic files must be protected against illicit internal use or intrusion by external parties.

### Classifications for National Security Reasons

Classification	Manual Transmission	Manual Storage	Electronic Transmission	Electronic Storage
<b>Top Secret</b> <b>Secret</b> <b>Confidential</b>	Cabinet Office delivers papers to Ministers' offices: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• double enveloped for Ministers</li> <li>• double enveloped for departments</li> </ul>	Keep in approved security container when not in use.	Information transmitted must be encrypted using high-grade systems certified and accredited by GCSB.	Electronic files must be stored on systems certified and accredited by GCSB.
<b>Restricted</b>	Cabinet Office delivers papers to Ministers' offices: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• unenveloped for Ministers</li> <li>• enveloped for departments</li> </ul>	Keep in secure storage when not in use.	Must be marked <b>Restricted</b> . May be transmitted by SEEmail or approved equivalent.	Electronic files must be protected against illicit internal use or intrusion by external parties.