



OVERSIGHT AND  
COMPLIANCE

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MEMORANDUM FOR: DoD FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT (FOIA) OFFICERS

SUBJECT: Climate Survey Reports

A climate survey is a commander's management tool that allows military and civilian leaders to proactively assess critical organizational climate dimensions that can have positive or negative impacts on an organization's effectiveness. The climate survey anonymously assesses perceptions of organizational effectiveness, equal opportunity, equal employment opportunity, fair treatment, and sexual assault prevention and response. In order to be effective, it is crucial that identities of climate survey participants be kept anonymous.

When FOIA requests are received for climate survey reports, it is critical that initial denial authorities seriously consider the harm that would result from the release of any information within the section of the report that contains the personal comments submitted by survey respondents. The release of these comments could have a serious chilling effect on the entire survey process within the DoD because future respondents to similar surveys, knowing that such comments become public, would not provide such open and frank comments. This, in turn, would seriously inhibit commanders in making future organizational-related decisions because they would not be receiving all the information needed. Additionally, it's quite possible that responses contain enough personally identifying information that some members of the survey community could identify responses that came from someone they know. These responses may seem generic to someone not involved in the climate survey, but specific to someone that was involved.

Accordingly, we recommend that DoD initial denial authorities seriously consider withholding the sections of climate surveys containing personal comments under Exemptions 5 and 6 of the FOIA (5 U.S.C. § 552 (b)(5) and (b)(6)). This recommendation does not necessarily apply to other sections of the survey reports.

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