



# Vanuatu

National Security Council

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## Security Classification Handbook

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Guidelines for protecting  
government information

OFFICIAL

OFFICIAL

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## Purpose

This handbook provides advice and procedures on how government agencies create, store and share information to ensure it is adequately protected.

Vanuatu government information is valuable. Protecting its confidentiality and sensitivity is critical to our business operations. Everyone who works in government has a duty to respect the confidentiality and integrity of government information.

Confidentiality refers to the limiting of access to information to authorised persons for approved purposes.

## Legal Framework

The Official Secrets Act [CAP 111] provides the legal basis for this Handbook. Under the Act it is an offence to obtain or share classified Government information without lawful authority. Any person guilty of an offence under the Act shall be liable to a fine up to VT 60,000 or up to three years imprisonment. Under section 36 of the Public Service Act No.11 of 1998, it is also a disciplinary offence to use government information for private purposes.

Also relevant is chapter 2(5)(1)(j) of the Constitution of The Republic of Vanuatu, which covers the right to privacy. The Right to Information Act No. 13 of 2016 builds on this principle, allowing the refusal of requests for information if they damage an individual's right to privacy.

The procedures in this Handbook also comply with the Archives Act No.13 of 1992 whereby all public records over 15 years of age will be preserved if they are of sufficient value. As per the Act, section 7(2)(b), the deposit of public records of a secret or confidential nature can be deferred on the grounds of national security, international relations, the effective administration of government offices, or where it would not be in the public interest.

## Key Principles

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- All information and public records that the Vanuatu Government needs to collect, store, process, generate or share to deliver services and conduct government business has real value and requires an appropriate degree of protection.
- Everyone who works with government — including public servants, contractors, consultants, and advisors — has a duty of confidentiality and a responsibility to safeguard Vanuatu Government information and public records, irrespective of whether it is marked or not, and must be provided with appropriate training.
- Access to sensitive information must only be given when there is a genuine ‘need to know’ and appropriate Public Service Commission background checks completed.
- Information received from or exchanged with external partners must be protected according to their standards and in accordance with any relevant international agreements and obligations.
- Information-sharing between relevant government agencies is core to government effectiveness and to protect Vanuatu from threats. Sharing is underpinned by a culture of trust between agencies that government information is handled and used appropriately.

## Security Classifications

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Security classifications indicate the sensitivity of information according to the likely impact resulting from loss or misuse. Vanuatu has changed its security classifications to four levels: TOP SECRET, SECRET, OFFICIAL: SENSITIVE and OFFICIAL. The latter two classifications cover all material previously classified as Confidential or Restricted Material under the Official Secrets Act (1980).



## What are Vanuatu's new security classifications used for?

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### **OFFICIAL**

Most information and public records created or processed by the public service, police and other government agencies.

### **OFFICIAL: SENSITIVE**

Official information governed by legislation that restricts its disclosure.

### **SECRET**

Sensitive official information that has an impact on the whole country.

### **TOP SECRET**

The most sensitive official information that has an impact on the whole country.

## Where is each one used?

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### **OFFICIAL**

All government ministries, departments, and agencies.

### **OFFICIAL: SENSITIVE**

Police investigations, legal case files, public and police service disciplinary matters.

### **SECRET**

Council of Ministers (COM) & Development Committee of Officials (DCO) meetings.

### **TOP SECRET**

National Security Council (NSC) and Security Officials Meeting (SOM). Some DCO and COM meetings



# Who can have access to the information?

## OFFICIAL

Anyone who has an official need to use the information.



### TLP: White

*Disclosure is not limited.*

## OFFICIAL: SENSITIVE

All Government and non-government individuals who have an official need to use the information.



### TLP: Green

*Limited disclosure to authorised individuals.*

## SECRET

Screened and authorised government employees, contractors or advisors with a legitimate business reason.



### TLP: Yellow

*Limited disclosure to authorised government employees and individuals only.*

## TOP SECRET

Senior government officials with a legitimate business reason.



### TLP: Red

*Not for disclosure. To authorised government employees only.*

TLP: Traffic Light Procedure



# What is the harm if the information is lost, stolen or published in the media?

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## OFFICIAL

LOW – Limited harm to people, organisations, or Vanuatu’s national interest

## SENSITIVE

MEDIUM – Some harm to government services, police investigations, judicial proceedings, disciplinary hearings or the personal privacy of individuals.

## SECRET

HIGH – Widespread harm to government services, people, Vanuatu’s international relations or Vanuatu’s national interest.

## TOP SECRET

VERY HIGH – Significant widespread harm to people, Vanuatu’s international relations, or the country’s security or economic wellbeing.





**TOP  
SECRET**

# Handling Classified Information

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Government information must be handled according to its classification. Each classification provides for a baseline set of personnel, physical and information security controls that offer an appropriate level of protection against loss, theft or misuse.

The key parts of information handling are:

- Apply markings — ensure the appropriate security classification is on the document or email as a protective security marking
- Limit personnel access — limit access to classified information to those people who ‘need to know’
- Store, file, print and copy — keep printed and electronic information protected and safe from accidental loss or theft
- Email — share information by email or other electronic means in a secure way
- Archive or disposal — delete electronic information, or shred or archive documents in such a way to ensure its protection and compliance with the Archives Act No.13 of 1992.

Requirements, at each level of classification, are as follows:



## OFFICIAL



## Apply markings

There is no requirement to mark routine OFFICIAL information.



## Personnel access

All Government and non-government individuals who have an official need to use the information.

Information may be taken out of the office.



## Store, file, print, and copy

Apply clear desk and screen protections.

Print and copy permitted over public or private equipment.



## Email

Transfer over public network infrastructure.



## Archive or disposal

Preserve information needed for work purposes.

For public records worthy of permanent preservation and more than 15 years old, consider preservation at the National Archives.

**OFFICIAL: SENSITIVE**



### Apply markings

Use the protective security marking

OFFICIAL: SENSITIVE.

Case: CAPITAL LETTERS

Style: BOLD

Colour: BLACK

Size: 12pt or greater

Position: Centred top and bottom of each page



### Personnel access

All Government and non-government individuals who have an official need to use the information.

Information may be taken out of the office.



### Store, file, print, and copy

Apply clear desk and screen protections.

Print and copy permitted over public or private equipment.



### Email

Transfer over public network infrastructure.



### Archive or disposal

Preserve information needed for work purposes.

For public records worthy of permanent preservation and more than 15 years old, consider preservation at the National Archives.

Shred unneeded documents that are not of sufficient value to warrant their preservation in the National Archives.



**SECRET****Apply markings**

Use the protective security marking **SECRET**.

Case: CAPITAL LETTERS

Style: BOLD

Colour: BLACK

Size: 12pt or greater

Position: Centred top and bottom of each page

**Personnel access**

Government employees with Public or Police Service Commission background checks, who have an official need to use the information.

Information must stay within government offices.

**Store, file, print, and copy**

Apply clear desk and screen protections.

Store in a lockable filing cabinet, office drawer, or room.

Print and copy permitted only from government equipment.

**Email**

Transfer over government communications system only using encryption.

**Archive or disposal**

Preserve information needed for work or archives purposes.

Defer the deposit of **SECRET** information with the National Archives if it could adversely affect national security.

Shred unneeded documents that are not of sufficient value to warrant their preservation in the National Archives.

**TOP SECRET****Apply markings**

Use the protective security marking TOP SECRET.

Case: CAPITAL LETTERS

Style: BOLD

Colour: BLACK

Size: 12pt or greater

Position: Centred top and bottom of each page

**Personnel access**

Only senior officials (Directors, Director-Generals) unless there are clear business reasons for wider knowledge to authorised individuals.

Information must stay within government offices.

**Store, file, print, and copy**

Apply clear desk and screen protections.

Store in a lockable filing cabinet.

Print and copy permitted only from government equipment.

**Email**

Transfer over government communications system only using encryption.

**Archive or disposal**

Preserve information needed for work or archives purposes.

Defer the deposit of TOP SECRET information with the National Archives if it could adversely affect national security.

Shred unneeded documents that are not of sufficient value to warrant their preservation in the National Archives.





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