History

Privacy is a dominant consideration of the Department of Defense (DoD). The Privacy Act of 1974 requires federal agencies to establish appropriate safeguards to “ensure the security and confidentiality of records and to protect against any anticipated threats or hazards to their security or integrity.” With increasing reliance on the Internet and electronic means to collect, store, and disseminate personal and sensitive information, the vulnerability of this information to unauthorized access and misuse is growing at Internet speed. The Federal Government considers protecting personal privacy in today’s digital age a top priority. In February 1996, the Office of Management and Budget issued circular A-130 (Management of Federal Information Resources), which required federal agencies to establish information management policies that respond to the privacy rights of individuals and “ensure that appropriate legal and technical safeguards are implemented.” In June 2000, OMB released its Memorandum on Privacy Policies and Data Collection on Federal Web Sites (M-00-13), reminding federal agencies that they are required by law and policy to establish clear privacy policies for their web activities. Most recently, in September 2000, the Government Accounting Office (GAO) found that the overwhelming majority of federal agencies reviewed adhere to OMB guidance. However, the GAO also determined that OMB guidance was vague and lacked necessary definitions regarding “major entry points” and “substantial personal information.”

Current Status

The Department of the Navy (DON) has stepped up to the challenge of Internet privacy, and all of its websites are in compliance with current OMB and DoD policies. OMB Circular No. A-11 dated July 2000 requested data (by 15 Dec 00) on the impact of full funding of existing capital assets now funded incrementally and a capital asset plan and justification for each major acquisition program to include a summary of spending for project stages; justification and other information; and cost, schedule, and performance goals.

Further, OMB encourages agencies to establish sound Privacy Policies and Privacy Impact Assessments (PIAs) as part of their commitment to protect personal privacy. While privacy policies outline best planning and practices at a policy level, PIAs evaluate the level of privacy in information systems at all levels throughout the System Life Cycle, from design to deployment. The Congress has recognized the Internal Revenue Service PIA, completed in 1996-97, as one of the “best practices” in government.
**Next Steps**

The DON will develop a privacy policy with an expected release date of April 2001. The DON will also begin the production of a Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA) during the 2nd quarter of FY 2001. In addition, the DON will seek to establish an Office of the Privacy Advocate to monitor and implement OMB and DoD guidance on the issue of privacy.