

We Have Clearance, Clarence!

The demand for individuals with federal security clearances has never been stronger. In the twelve months following September 11th, 2001 the number of clearances submitted increased nearly forty percent (G.I. Jobs, 2003). However, there is evidence that number has grown significantly as the war on terrorism has gained momentum and homeland security initiatives have increased. The re-building in Afghanistan and Iraq may also have some impact on the number of clearances being requested. However it may not be these factors alone causing the demand for clearances. "The Defense Security Services (DSS), operating under the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), saw a dramatic increase in security clearance requests even before the September 11th attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center. Considering the emphasis President Bush placed on defense projects in his latest budget proposal, growth in jobs requiring security clearances, and thus clearance investigation requests, is highly likely" (Thinkamajob.com, 2003).

Three types of security clearances exist: Confidential (re-investigation every 15 years), Secret (re-investigation every 10 years) and Top Secret (re-investigation every 5 years). "Companies are gobbling up people with clearances," says Howard Taylor, transition assistance manager at the Army Career and Alumni Program office at Fort Drum, N.Y. "Getting a clearance can be expensive - \$10,000 for a Confidential, \$80,000 for Top Secret - so if employers can hire someone who's already been through the process, they're excited" (G.I. Jobs, 2003). Sources may vary when estimating costs to acquire a clearance for an employee, but all agree it is neither cheap nor fast to obtain. One of the reasons it is so difficult to find clearances is because "individuals may not request a Personal Security Investigation on their own; only approved military and civilian organizations or contractors can submit these requests" (Thingamajob.com, 2003).

The largest available pool of candidates with active clearances comes from the military. With over 200,000 people separating from the service annually, many will possess these high demand clearances.