

# Chapter 100 Secrecy and Access

- 101 General
- 102 Information as to Status of an Application
- 103 Right of Public to Inspect Patent Files and Some Application Files
- 104 Power to Inspect Application
- 105 Disbarred Attorney Cannot Inspect
- 106 Control of Inspection by Assignee
- 106.01 Rights of Assignee of Part Interest
- 107 "Secrecy Order" Cases
- 107.01 "Review" of Applications for Secrecy Order
- 107.02 Prosecution of "Secrecy Order" Cases
- 108 Applications relating to Atomic Energy
- 109 Security Markings

## 101 General [R-35]

*35 U.S.C. 122. Confidential status of applications.* Applications for patents shall be kept in confidence by the Patent Office and no information concerning the same given without authority of the applicant or owner unless necessary to carry out the provisions of any Act of Congress or in such special circumstances as may be determined by the Commissioner.

*18 U.S.C. 2071. Concealment, removal, or mutilation generally.* (a) Whoever willfully and unlawfully conceals, removes, mutilates, obliterates, or destroys, or attempts to do so, or, with intent to do so takes and carries away any record, proceeding, map, book, paper, document, or other thing, filed or deposited with any clerk or officer of any court of the United States, or in any public office, or with any judicial or public officer of the United States, shall be fined not more than \$2,000 or imprisoned not more than three years, or both.

(b) Whoever, having the custody of any such record, proceeding, map, book, document, paper, or other thing, willfully and unlawfully conceals, removes, mutilates, obliterates, falsifies, or destroys the same, shall be fined not more than \$2,000 or imprisoned not more than three years, or both; and shall forfeit his office and be disqualified from holding any office under the United States.

*Extract from Rule 14. Patent applications preserved in secrecy.* (a) Except as provided in rule 11(b) pending patent applications are preserved in secrecy. No information will be given by the Office respecting the filing by any particular person of an application for a patent, the pendency of any particular case before it, or the subject matter of any particular application, nor will access be given to or copies furnished of any pending application or papers relating thereto, without written authority in that particular application from the applicant or his assignee or attorney or agent of

record, unless it shall be necessary to the proper conduct of business before the Office or as provided by these rules.

All Patent Office employees are legally obligated to preserve pending applications for patents in confidence. 35 U.S.C. 122 and 18 U.S.C. 2071 impose statutory requirements which cover the handling of patent applications and related documents. Suspension, removal, and even criminal penalties may be imposed for violations of these statutes.

In order to provide prompt and orderly service to the public, application files must be readily available to authorized Patent Office employees at all times. Accordingly, in carrying or transporting applications and related papers, care must be exercised by Patent Office employees, especially in corridors and elevators, to insure that applications and related papers are always under employee surveillance and control. Application files must not be displayed or handled so as to permit perusal or inspection by any unauthorized member of the public.

Interoffice mail must be sent in appropriate envelopes.

No part of any application or paper related thereto should be reproduced or copied except for official purposes.

No patent application or related document may be removed from the premises occupied by the Patent Office, except for handling as required by the issue process, unless specifically authorized by the Commissioner. If such authorization is given, the employee having custody will be responsible for maintaining confidentiality and otherwise conforming with the requirements of law.

Applications must not be placed in desk drawers or other locations where they might be easily overlooked or not visible to authorized personnel.

Whenever an application is removed from the operating area having custody of the file, a charge card with appropriate notations must be properly and promptly filed.

Papers arriving within the groups must be properly and promptly placed within the appropriate files. If papers are received with faulty identification, this should be corrected at once. If papers are received at a destination for which they are not intended due to faulty identification or routing, appropriate corrective action should be taken at once to insure the prompt

receipt thereof at the intended destination. See §§ 508.01 and 508.03.

All Patent Office employees should bear in mind at all times the critical importance of insuring the confidentiality and accessibility of patent application files and related documents, and in addition to the specific procedures referred to above, should take all appropriate action to that end.

Examiners, while holding interviews with attorneys and applicants, should be careful to prevent exposures of files and drawings of other applicants.

Extreme care should be taken to prevent inadvertent disclosure of the filing date or serial number of any application filed by another party. This applies not only to Office actions but also to notes (usually in pencil) in the file wrapper.

Several lithographic firms in the Washington, D.C. area file bonds each year with the Patent Office for the privilege of temporarily withdrawing certain drawings from the Patent Office in order that drawings may be prepared for foreign filing.

Patent Office employees are authorized to release drawings to representatives of these firms provided they: (1) Have an unexpired identification card, (2) Present an order signed by a party of record in the application, and (3) Leave a receipt which can be filed as a charge card.

Normally, drawings will be returned within three days. Any drawings which have not been returned within five days or which are returned in damaged condition should be reported immediately to the Office of Public Services (Ext. 73236).

## 102 Information as to Status of an Application [R-35]

1. If an application has matured into a patent, status information (including the patent number, class, etc.) relative to the application may be given to anyone.

2. If an application is in pending or abandoned status and has not been referred to by number and date in a United States or foreign patent or printed application, status information may be given only to Patent Office employees and parties of record such as:

- (a) The applicant.
- (b) The attorney or agent of record in the application.
- (c) The assignee of record in the Patent Office.
- (d) Anyone who has and furnishes written authority from a, b, or c.

3. If an application has been referred to by number and date in a United States or foreign patent or printed application, status information may be given to Patent Office employees and to anyone who furnishes the Patent Office with a written request citing the application in question by serial number and date of filing. The source document (a United States or foreign patent or printed application) must be identified in the written request by the country, number and date of such patent or application.

If a written request for status information is presented without a copy of the source document, Patent Office employees will check to see that the source document and the application in question are properly identified and that the source document refers to the application in question before supplying the status information. Requests for information not accompanied with a copy of the source document may require the Office to obtain a copy of the source document for verification before status information can be supplied. This may result in some delay before the desired status information can be forwarded to the requester.

If a copy of the source document is presented, the Office will verify that the United States application in question is cited therein. After checking, status information may be immediately given and the source document copy may be returned to the requester. In either case, at the time the status information is supplied, the person supplying the status information marks the request "Information furnished", the date and his name. The request is then placed in the file wrapper or forwarded to the appropriate area (group art unit, abandoned files, etc.) for inclusion in the file wrapper as part of the official record of the application. The applicant is not consulted. See § 203.08.

## 103 Right of Public to Inspect Patent Files and Some Application Files [R-35]

*Rule 11. Files open to the public.* (a) After a patent has been issued, the specification, drawings, and all papers relating to the case in the file of the patent are open to inspection by the general public, and copies may be furnished upon paying the fee therefor. The file of any terminated interference involving a patent, or an application on which a patent has subsequently issued, is similarly open to public inspection and procurement of copies. See trademark rule 2.27 for trademark files.

(b) Applications in which the Office has accepted a request filed under rule 139 are open to inspection by the general public, and copies may be furnished upon paying the fee therefor.

Whenever a patent relies upon the filing date of an earlier but still pending application, the public is entitled to see the portion of the earlier application that relates to the common subject matter, and also what prosecution, if any, was had in the earlier application of subject matter claimed in the patent. The interested party may file a petition to the Commissioner for access to the application. (See § 1002.02(k).)

Inasmuch as the Post Office address is necessary for the complete identification of the petitioner, it should always be included complete with the ZIP Code number.

The petition may be filed either with proof of service of a copy upon the applicant, owner or attorney of record, if known, in the application to which access is sought, or may be filed in duplicate, in which case the duplicate copy is sent by the associate solicitor to the applicant, attorney or owner of the application, who is given a limited period, as a week or ten days, within which to state any objection he may have to the granting of the petition. If no objection is raised, the petition is approved by the associate solicitor. If there is no objection the petitioner is permitted to see the entire parent application. Otherwise, the petitioner is allowed to order a copy of only that portion of the parent application that relates to the common subject matter. A separate petition should be filed for each application to which access is desired, or sufficient extra copies provided so there may be one for placement in each application file, if the petition be granted, and one for service upon each attorney of record, if the applicant has different attorneys in his applications. Each petition should show not only why access is desired, but also why petitioner believes he is entitled to access.

The patent interference examiner handles all petitions for access to applications involved in an interference or having an interference background.

If a defensive publication, an abstract or an abbreviature has been published, the entire application is available to the public for inspection and obtaining copies, see § 711.06.

*Extract from Rule 14.* (b) Except as provided in rule 11(b) abandoned applications are likewise not open to public inspection, except that if an application referred to in a United States patent is abandoned and is available, it may be inspected or copies obtained by any person on written request, without notice to the applicant. Abandoned applications may be destroyed after twenty years from their filing date, except those to which particular attention has been called and which have been marked for preservation. Abandoned applications will not be returned.

(d) Selected decisions of the Board of Appeals, or of the Commissioner, in abandoned applications not

otherwise open to public inspection (paragraph (b) of this rule) may be published or made available for publication at the Commissioner's discretion, unless the applicant timely presents sufficient reasons for not doing so. The applicant will be notified, through the attorney of record in the application file, when it is proposed to release such a decision and a time not less than thirty days set for presenting any such reasons. The fact that the subject matter of the application has not been made public in any manner, or that the same subject matter is being prosecuted in a pending application, will be considered sufficient reason for not releasing the decision if the applicant so requests unless the text of the decision contains no description of such subject matter. Other reasons presented will be duly considered.

See rule 2.27 for trademark applications.

Access to abandoned patent applications forming a part of a streamlined continuation application is governed by rule 14(b) and requires a written request. However, such access must be limited to those papers which were part of the abandoned application.

Rule 14(d) authorizes publication of decisions of the Board of Appeals or of the Commissioner, in abandoned applications, under certain conditions.

*Rule 15. Requests for identifiable records.* (a) Requests for records not disclosed to the public as part of the regular informational activity of the Patent Office and which are not otherwise dealt with in these rules may be made by completing Form CD-244, "Application to Inspect Department Records," and submitting this form, in person or by mail, to the Commissioner of Patents, Washington, D.C., 20231. A non-refundable application fee of \$2.00 must accompany each application. Copies of Form CD-244 are available in the Central Reference and Records Inspection Facility, Room 2122, Department of Commerce Building, Washington, D.C., 20230, the search room of the Patent Reference Branch of the Patent Office, the search room of the Trademark Examining Operation, and in many public information offices and field offices of the Department of Commerce. If the requested record is identifiable, the request will be reviewed by the appropriate official authorized to make an initial determination of the availability of the record. If it is determined that the material is not to be made available to the requesting person, said person shall be notified in writing of that fact and the reasons why the record will not be disclosed. If the record is to be made available, inspection will be permitted in the appropriate Patent Office search room. Fees for copies of records and for searches and related services are payable in accordance with the schedule of fees and charges established in § 4.8 of Title 15, Code of Federal Regulations.

(b) Any person whose application to inspect a record has been refused may request a reconsideration of the initial denial by completing and submitting the appro-

priate section of the Form CD-244. The request for reconsideration should be made within 30 days of the date of the original denial. In submitting such request the party should include any written argument he desires to support his belief that the record requested should be made available. No personal appearance, oral argument, or hearing shall be permitted. The decision upon such request shall be made by the Commissioner of Patents, and shall be based upon the original request, the denial, and any written argument submitted by the person seeking access to the record. The decision upon review shall be promptly made in writing and communicated to the person seeking access. If the decision is wholly or partly in favor of availability, the requested record to such extent shall be made available for inspection as described in paragraph (a) of this rule. To the extent that the decision is adverse to the request, the reasons for the denial shall be stated. A decision upon review completed as provided herein shall constitute the final decision and action of the Patent Office as to the availability of a requested record, except as may be required by court proceedings initiated pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 552(a) (3). Reconsiderations resulting in final decisions as prescribed herein shall be indexed and made available in the search room of the Patent Reference Branch.

(c) Procedures applicable in the event of a subpoena, order, or other compulsory process or demand of a court or other authority shall be those set forth in Section 7 of Department Order 64 (32 F.R. 9734, July 4, 1967).

## 104 Power to Inspect Application [R-35]

No person but the applicant (any one of joint applicants), applicant's legal representative, the assignee whose assignment is of record, or the attorney, agent or associate attorney of record will be permitted to have access to the file of any pending application, except as provided for under rule 11(b) or under the interference rules, unless written authority from one of the above indicated parties, identifying the application to be inspected, is made of record, or upon the written order of the Commissioner, which will also become a part of the record of the case.

Approval by the primary examiner of a power to inspect is *not* required. The clerk of the group to which the application is assigned ascertains that the power is properly signed by one of the above indicated parties, and if acceptable, enters it into the file. If the power to inspect is unacceptable, notification of non-entry is written by the clerk to the person who signed the power.

When a power to inspect is received while a file is under the jurisdiction of a service branch, such as the Customer Services Division, the Service Branch of the Board of Appeals, and

the Issue and Gazette Division, the question of permission to inspect is decided by the head of the branch who, if he approves, indicates the approval directly on the power.

Power to inspect may be granted when a duplicate copy of a filed power to inspect is hand delivered. The copy with indication of approval is placed in the file.

A "power to inspect" is, in effect, the same as a "power to inspect and make copies."

Where an applicant relied upon his application as a means to interfere with a competitor's business or customers, permission to inspect the application may be given the competitor by the Commissioner. (Ex Parte Bonnie-B Co. Inc., 1923 C.D. 42; 313 O.G. 453.)

An unrestricted power to inspect given by an applicant is, under existing practice, recognized as good until and unless rescinded. The same is true in the case of one given by the attorney or assignee so long as such attorney or assignee retains his connection with the application.

Permission to inspect given by the Commissioner, however, is not of a continuing nature, since the conditions that justified the permit to inspect when given may not obtain at a later date.

### ACCESS TO PATENT APPLICATION AND INTERFERENCE FILES

In order to insure that access to patent application and interference files is given only to persons who are entitled thereto or who are specially authorized to have access under rule 14 of the Rules of Practice in Patent Cases, and to insure also that the file record identifies any such specially authorized person who has been given access to a file, the following practice will be observed by all personnel of the Patent Office:

1. Access, as provided for in the Rules of Practice, will be given on *oral request* to any applicant, patentee, assignee, or attorney or agent of record in an application or patent only upon *proof of identity* or upon *recognition* based on personal acquaintance.

2. Where a power of attorney or authorization of agent was given to a registered firm prior to July 2, 1971, access will be given upon oral request as in paragraph 1 above to any registered member or employee of the firm who has signatory power for the firm.

3. Unregistered employees of attorneys or agents, public stenographers, and all other persons not within the provisions of paragraphs 1 and 2 above will be given access only upon presentation of a *written authorization for access* signed by a person specified in paragraph 1

above, which authorization will be entered as a part of the official file.

**105 Disbarred Attorney Cannot Inspect**

Patent Office employees are forbidden to hold either oral or written communication with an attorney who has been suspended or excluded from practice regarding an application unless it be one in which said attorney is the applicant. Power to inspect given to such an attorney will not be accepted.

**106 Control of Inspection by Assignee [R-29]**

The assignee of the entire interest in an application may intervene in the prosecution of the case, appointing an attorney of his own choice. (See rule 32.) Such intervention, however, does not exclude the applicant from access to the application to see that it is being prosecuted properly, unless the assignee makes specific request to that effect. Even when such request is made, the applicant may be permit-

ted to inspect the case on sufficient showing why such inspection is necessary to conserve his rights. In re The Kellogg Switchboard & Supply Company, 1906 C.D. 274.

**106.01 Rights of Assignee of Part Interest**

While it is only the assignee of the entire interest who can intervene in the prosecution of an application or interference to the exclusion of the applicant, an assignee of a part interest or a licensee of exclusive right is entitled to inspect the application.

**107 "Secrecy Order" Cases [R-28]**

Title 35, United States Code, section 181 provides, in part, that any invention in which the Government does not have a property interest, and whose publication or disclosure by the granting of a patent might, in the opinion of the Commissioner, be detrimental to the national security, shall be made available to the

defense agencies. Upon notification by the defense agencies, the Commissioner is directed to order that such inventions be kept secret and to withhold the grant of a patent for such period as the national interest requires. Where the Government has a property interest, the interested Government agency determines whether to notify the Commissioner to keep the invention secret.

35 U.S.C. 184, *Filing of application in foreign country*. Except when authorized by a license obtained from the Commissioner a person shall not file or cause or authorize to be filed in any foreign country prior to six months after filing in the United States an application for patent or for the registration of a utility model, industrial design, or model in respect of an invention made in this country. A license shall not be granted with respect to an invention subject to an order issued by the Commissioner pursuant to section 181 of this title without the concurrence of the head of the departments and the chief officers of the agencies who caused the order to be issued. The license may be granted retroactively where an application has been inadvertently filed abroad and the application does not disclose an invention within the scope of section 181 of this title.

The term "application" when used in this chapter includes applications and any modifications, amendments, or supplements thereto, or divisions thereof.

Since May 3, 1965, all licenses granted by the Commissioner of Patents to file patent applications in foreign countries have been made of record in the application to which they correspond. The granted request for a license and the license are given paper numbers and endorsed on the file wrapper and on the Serial Register Card. Requests for licenses which are not approved are neither recorded nor placed in the application file wrapper.

#### 107.01 "Review" of Applications for Secrecy Order [R-18]

Under 35 U.S.C. 181 the obligation is directly on the Patent Office to appreciate the possible interest of the defense agencies in pending applications and to take steps to make them available to such agencies.

All new applications received in the Patent Office are now being screened by Group 220 personnel to determine which applications should be made available for review or treated under the Atomic Energy and Space Acts for property interests.

All applications that have been screened by Group 220 will be stamped "LICENSING & REVIEW" inside the file wrapper. This stamp simply indicates that the application has been initially screened and is not to be con-

sidered as a conclusive indication of the security status of the application or as an indication that a license for foreign filing will be granted.

All papers subsequently filed must be inspected by the examiner to determine whether matter of an obvious defense interest which requires a security review has been introduced into the application. In such applications forwarded to the Licensing and Review Section of Group 220, it is helpful if a check mark is placed in the margin opposite to the part which is significant in suggesting security review.

Applications in Group 220 for the review thereof by the appropriate defense agency may be borrowed by the examiner when reached for action. Allowable applications requiring consideration for processing under Section 152 of the Atomic Energy Act (42 U.S.C. 2182) and/or Section 305c of the Space Act (42 U.S.C. 2457c) are processed to issue, including counting of the issue, and forwarded through Group 220 to the Issue and Gazette Branch. When the security status of the application cannot be promptly decided, Group 220 will report the progress that has been made to the group director. Any action to be taken in the case, for the purpose of advancing said group date, must be arranged through the group director.

#### 107.02 Prosecution of "Secrecy Order" Cases [R-28]

"Secrecy Order" Cases are examined as in other cases, but may not be passed for issue; nor will an interference be declared where one or more of the conflicting cases is secret. See § 1111.04.

In case of a final rejection, while such action must be properly responded to, and an appeal, if filed, must be completed by the applicant to prevent abandonment, such appeal will not be set for hearing by the Board of Appeals until the secrecy order is removed, unless specifically ordered by the Commissioner.

When a "Secrecy Order" Case is in condition for allowance a notice of allowability [Form D-10] is issued, thus closing the prosecution. Any amendments received thereafter are not entered or responded to until such time as the secrecy order is rescinded. At such time amendments which are free from objection will be entered; otherwise they are denied entry.

#### 108 Applications Relating to Atomic Energy [R-28]

Rule 14(c) reads as follows:

"Applications for patents which disclose or which appear to disclose, or which purport to disclose, in-

ventions or discoveries relating to atomic energy are reported to the Atomic Energy Commission and the Commission will be given access to such applications, but such reporting does not constitute a determination that the subject matter of each application so reported is in fact useful or an invention or discovery or that such application in fact discloses subject matter in categories specified by secs. 151(c) and 151(d) of the Atomic Energy Act of 1954, 68 Stat. 919; 42 U.S.C. 2181."

The Atomic Energy Act of 1954 requires that the Commissioner of Patents shall notify the Atomic Energy Commission of all applications for patent which, in his opinion, disclose inventions or discoveries required to be reported under subsection 151c (42 U.S.C. 2181c) which reads in part as follows:

"... any invention or discovery useful in the production or utilization of special nuclear material or atomic energy. . . ."

The term "atomic energy" is defined as all forms of energy released in the course of nuclear fission or nuclear transformation (42 U.S.C. 2014c).

All applications received in the Patent Office are sent to Licensing and Review for screening by Group 220 personnel, under Rule 14(c), in order for the Commissioner to fulfill his responsibilities under section 151(d) (42 U.S.C. 2181d) of the Atomic Energy Act. Papers subsequently added must be inspected promptly by the examiner when received to determine whether the application has been amended to relate to atomic energy and those so related must be promptly forwarded to Licensing and Review.

When applications are forwarded to Group 220 for consideration of the above requirements, it is helpful if a check mark is made in the margin opposite to the part of the paper which is significant in suggesting that the application be reported.

In considering applications under the terms of rule 14(c), the relation of the subject matter to national security under § 107.01 is not a significant factor. EVEN applications using a well-known radioactive source for any purpose or which disclose inventions having special relation to atomic energy **MUST BE SUBMITTED TO Group 220.** See § 706.03 (b).

### 109 Security Markings [R-28]

Under Executive Order 10,501, 18 Federal Register Number 220, page 7049, standards are prescribed for the marking, handling, and care of official information which requires safeguarding in the interest of security.

Papers marked as prescribed in the Executive Order, and showing that such marking is applied by, or at the direction of, a Government Agency, are accepted in patent applications. All applications or papers in the Patent Office bearing words such as "Secret," or "Confidential," must be promptly referred to Group 220 for clarification or security treatment. Under no circumstances can any such application, drawing, exhibit, or other paper be placed in public records, such as the Patented Files, until all security markings have been considered and declassified or otherwise explained.