

Department Of Homeland Security Employees Have Been Told To Report Colleagues Suspected Of Leaking Information

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Hamed Aleaziz BuzzFeed News Reporter
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Alex Milan Tracy / Sipa USA via AP

Department of Homeland Security employees were told to report colleagues they suspected of sharing sensitive internal information, along with those who requested

information that fell out of their day-to-day duties, according to an email obtained by BuzzFeed News.

Randolph D. "Tex" Alles, a senior DHS official, emailed all employees on Tuesday warning them to be careful handling “all classified, controlled unclassified, and draft information” and that unauthorized disclosures — whether deliberate or inadvertent — risked violating agency policy and potentially federal law. Alles sent the email after “sensitive but unclassified” information had been shared with “external entities.”

Alles did not specify that the “external entities” were media outlets, but the Trump administration has repeatedly criticized leaks of internal documents and attempted to crack down on such disclosures.

“This is another way to say to people: People are watching you. It is not just us, but your fellow colleagues now have an eye on you,” said Ur Jaddou, a former lead DHS official under the Obama administration.

In his email to staff, Alles told DHS employees to report those they suspect of “providing classified, sensitive but unclassified, controlled unclassified information or draft information to unauthorized personnel.” What’s more, Alles said employees should report when they receive a request for the same set of information that is outside the “scope of responsibilities” of the person asking for the document.

DHS officials have repeatedly warned employees not to leak information to the media.

Last year, US immigration officials, including asylum and refugee officers, were told that they would be fired for leaking information to the media, according to an email sent to staff and obtained by BuzzFeed News. The then-acting director of US Citizenship and Immigration Services, Mark Koumans, sent the email to employees telling them that as they regularly handle sensitive information, they need to guard it closely.

“We have the responsibility to protect the information that the agency and the public have entrusted to us and it is imperative that we not betray that trust through the unauthorized disclosure ('leaking') of any such information,” he wrote. “...recent unauthorized disclosures of sensitive, for official use only, and internal use only information by USCIS personnel to media outlets have brought this issue to the forefront.” He added that staff would be reprimanded and potentially suspended for two weeks for a first offense, another two weeks for a second offense, and terminated or removed from their job for a third leak.

In early 2019, a senior DHS official warned agency employees not to disclose “nonpublic information” or they would potentially face criminal, civil, or administrative consequences.