Police Instructions

Electronic redaction

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Policy statement and principles

What

This chapter sets out the steps for electronically redacting information from documents to be disclosed by Police. It applies to all employees involved in the generation, maintenance, and disclosure of Police documents.

Why

Being able to effectively redact personal or sensitive information from documents being released is a vital part of several Police processes such as criminal disclosure and responding to information requests. However, if the process is done incorrectly, private information could be left hidden in the document, or the removed information might be able to be recovered. This policy provides an approved method for redacting documents into a PDF format with high confidence that unwanted information has been permanently removed.

How

Use Adobe Acrobat Pro DC (or a later version) when redacting text and images from PDF files.

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Overview

Introduction

Disclosure of information is a vital part of several Police processes, but it can be prone to error and can be a labour-intensive task. Because of the volume of correspondence, electronic disclosure of documents can be a more efficient method of disclosing a file to interested parties than disclosure in paper form. In general, except for small files or some specific information, electronic disclosure is Police's favoured method of disclosure.

Electronic redaction

The process of withholding/removing specific parts from information being disclosed or exchanged as part of Police business or operations is called 'redaction'. When performed on electronic documents and information, it is called 'electronic redaction'.

Information that is initially marked for removal from a document is shown in a red outline. Information subsequently removed from a document by redaction is indicated by a black box (i.e., the outline has been filled in).

In addition to regular text and images in a document, other non-visible data that Police does not want disclosed could be present in the background of the electronic file, including embedded files and metadata. If the sanitisation procedure is not followed while applying redactions, this material may be recoverable by the recipient of the material.

Note: Adobe Acrobat Pro will prompt you to sanitise a document by default when you apply redactions, but always double-check that you have sanitised the document before releasing it.

Compliance with electronic redaction instructions

All employees must comply with the electronic redaction instructions detailed in this chapter. It is critical that supervisors of employees who are making electronic redactions ensure the disclosure complies with these instructions, to prevent compromising the confidentiality of information.

Unauthorised disclosures due to failure to redact correctly can have serious consequences, including:

- legal and financial repercussions for breaches of confidentiality or privacy
- placing law enforcement processes, such as prosecutions, at risk
- putting members of the public and Police employees at risk
- reputational damage to Police, and erosion of public confidence in Police.

The following methods of redaction must NOT be used in any circumstances:

- redaction of a document by electronically highlighting text in the same colour as the text
- redaction of a document by manually covering over information intended to be removed
- redaction of a hardcopy document using a marker pen and photocopier.

Common scenarios at Police where files may need to be redacted before being disclosed include:

- criminal disclosure
- Privacy Act requests
- Official Information Act requests
- proactive disclosure (website; media releases)
- sharing information internally or externally with a need to restrict some source data.

Note: This chapter is about how to create an electronic file with redacted content. It does not cover guidance on what information should be disclosed, what can be withheld, and if redaction is required. For guidance on these things before you prepare a file for disclosure, see:

- Disclosure under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA)
- 'Criminal disclosure' for disclosure under the Criminal Disclosure Act 2008
- 'Police Human Sources information in warrants/orders and disclosure'

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- 'Privacy and official information' for releases under the Official Information Act 1982 and the Privacy Act 2020.

Approved electronic redaction software

Adobe Acrobat Pro DC (or a later version) must be used for all cases of electronic redaction - it is the minimum approved redaction software for New Zealand Police.

To obtain Adobe Acrobat Pro DC (or a later version), follow this standard software request procedure.

Step	Action
1	Open a hardware/software web form on the Police Service Now portal.
2	Follow the form's instructions to submit the request electronically. If further help is required, contact the Helpdesk (ext. 43333).

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Creating a redacted electronic file

Quick glance process

Below is a simple visual guide to electronically redacting Police documents with Adobe Acrobat Pro.
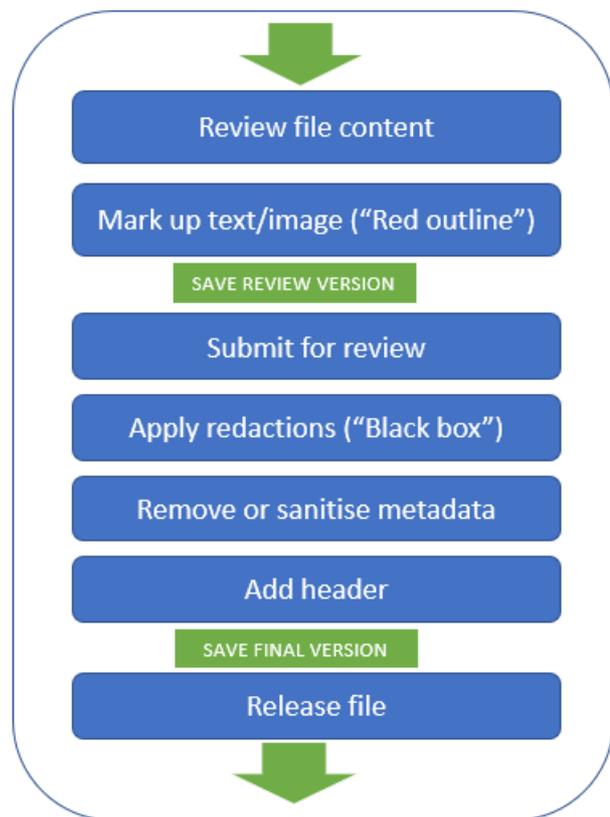
Detailed process

When electronically redacting files, follow these more detailed steps.

	Task	'How to steps'

1	**Collate the relevant information to be disclosed.**
	
	The source documents may be in various formats to begin with, such as Word, Excel, PowerPoint, etc.
		If necessary, convert the original electronic file(s) to PDF:
		    - Right click on the file(s).
		    - Click 'Convert to Adobe PDF'.
		    - Select a save location and name the file.
		    - Click Save.

2	**Review the file for any information to be withheld.**
	
	Ensure you review the file according to the type of disclosure it is.
		For guidance on how to review files for disclosure, see the relevant Police Instructions chapter, e.g.:
		    - Reviewing for criminal disclosure
		    - Reviewing for OIA or privacy requests

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3	**Electronically mark ("red outline") the sensitive information for redaction.**	Open the PDF in Adobe Acrobat Pro DC. Click "Tools", then find and click the "Redact" icon (or find the Redact icon on the right-hand side of the window). Click, hold and drag your cursor over any text or images you want to redact. It will be marked for redaction by a red outline. To create an entire box, hold the Ctrl key down and click and drag the cursor diagonally down. **Note:** Consider using the 'Ctrl-f' search function to check if there are any additional instances of the item(s) that need to be redacted e.g. surname, address street name.
3a	**Note:** If the document does not require any redactions, it still must be **sanitised** before being disclosed. To do this, follow the step at right.	Click "Sanitise Document". Click "OK". Clearly name your file as "SANITISED" e.g. "SMITH 20110902 Disclosure pgs 1-50_SANITISED." *Proceed to step 6.*
4	**Select the grounds for redaction for each marked up section.** If you are unfamiliar with the various grounds for withholding information, read the overview [here](#).	Right click on the marked-up text or image (each red outline). Hover over "New Zealand Police" at the bottom of the pop-up box. Choose and click on whichever ground of the relevant Act you are redacting the information under.
5	**Save a copy of the marked up ("red outline") version.**	It is useful for a reviewer to see this "red outline" version instead of having to compare two documents (the unmarked original alongside a redacted "black box" version). Clearly name your file as "marked up red outline", e.g., "SMITH 20110902 Disclosure pgs 1-50_marked up red outline." **IMPORTANT:** Only select 'save' rather than 'apply and save' at this step.
6	**Submit the marked up ("red outline") file to a supervisor(s) for review.**	**IMPORTANT:** Ensure you closely follow the appropriate review steps and get the required signoffs.
7	**Make any changes to the document required by the reviewer.** **IMPORTANT:** If there are still no redactions necessary in the document after the review, skip to step 9.	If required, this may include altering red outline sections or adding new ones, etc. If you make changes, have them checked and approved by the reviewer before proceeding to the next step. Save the document again to ensure it will match the final redacted version.

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8	**Permanently redact ("black out") the marked information and sanitise the doc.** Once any information is blacked out, it cannot be undone.	Use the saved 'red outline' version of the document. Click the "Apply" button at top right to permanently redact the marked content. A box will appear, asking if you wish to also sanitise and remove hidden information in the document. Ensure this is activated (slider is blue) Click "OK".
9	**Save a copy of the redacted (blacked out), sanitised file.**	Save the document - it does not need to be renamed because it will save as a separate document with "Redacted" automatically appearing after the title. The red outline version will remain saved. **Note:** if there are no redactions in the document, save the file as "SANITISED", e.g., "SMITH 20110902 Disclosure pgs 1-50_SANITISED."
10	**Add a Header.**	Find and click the "Edit PDF" icon. On the top menu, select "Header & Footer" > "Add". Type relevant text in the "Centre Header Text" text box - e.g. Disclosed by NZ Police under the Official Information Act 1982 Select "OK" Click "Save".

Your file will now be ready for release.

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