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Please let me have details of Unidentified Flying Objects: MOD's policy statement on alleged UFO phenomenon, and reports which have been released to the public from as far back as possible.

Response

I am writing concerning your Freedom of Information request for the Ministry of Defence policy on alleged 'unidentified flying object' phenomenon and reports which have been released to the public. Your request has been passed to this department as we are the focal point within the Ministry of Defence for correspondence about UFOs.

First, it may be helpful if I explain that the Ministry of Defence does not have any expertise or role in respect of 'UFO/flying saucer' matters or to the question of the existence or otherwise of extraterrestrial lifeforms, about which it remains totally open-minded. I should add that to date the MOD knows of no evidence which substantiates the existence of these alleged phenomena. Any reports of UFO sightings the MOD receives are examined solely to establish whether what was seen might have some defence significance; namely, whether there is any evidence that the United Kingdom's airspace might have been compromised by hostile or unauthorised air activity. Unless there is evidence of a potential threat to the United Kingdom from an external military source, and to date no 'UFO' report has revealed such evidence, we do not attempt to identify the precise nature of each reported sighting. We believe it is possible that rational explanations, such as aircraft lights or natural phenomena, could be found for them, but it is not the function of the MOD to provide this kind of aerial identification service. We could not justify expenditure of public funds on investigations which go beyond our specific defence remit.

With regard to the records the MOD holds of such reports, these are kept on paper files in the order in which they are received and this department currently has such records spanning a 25 year period. These records are not held electronically, but are filed on paper files in the order in which they were received. In order to assist members of the public with enquiries about UFO sightings reported to the MOD, this department is currently compiling a database of reports which we intend to publish in the MOD Freedom of Information Publication Scheme at the end of June 2005. The Scheme which already contains some documents about UFOs, including a class of information on the well known events at Rendlesham Forest, Suffolk in December 1980, can be found on the internet at <http://www.foi.mod.uk>. A search under 'UFO' will direct you to this

information. In addition, there are MOD files on UFOs which are open to the public at The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 4DU. The National Archives on line catalogue and details of how to access these records can be found on their website at <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk>.

I hope this is helpful. If this information does not address your requirements or you wish to complain about any aspect of the handling of this request, then you should contact the undersigned in the first instance. Should you remain dissatisfied, then you may apply for an internal review by contacting the Director of Information Exploitation, 6th Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, London SW1A 2HB.

If you are still unhappy following an internal review, you may take your complaint to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not investigate your case until the MOD internal review process has been completed. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website, <http://www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk>