

## Too Little Information - or Too Much - Raises Clearance Questions

By Rick Maze

The biggest mistake service members make when applying for security clearances is providing too little information — usually because they failed to read the directions, says Nicole Smith, a lawyer specializing in representing clients with clearance issues. The second biggest mistake is providing too much information, says Smith, a former security background investigator who specializes in legal assistance for service members, civilians and contractor personnel as an associate with Tully Rinckey PLLC. The law firm specializes in federal employment law. Missing information such as addresses and dates for residences, employment and foreign travel may not necessarily lead to the denial of a security clearance, but it will attract extra attention to the application by the investigator who must review the information to make sure the questionnaire is completed, Smith said. Leaving out a date on one question and an address on another might not seem like a big deal, but Smith said enough omissions — intentional or not — start to raise questions "about honesty and reliability." Those are key factors in the decision whether to grant even the lowest level clearance sought by service members. Financial delinquencies over the last seven years also need to be reported, even if they have been resolved, she said. Leaving the information off the application only invites more questions, because a simple credit check by investigators will reveal the delinquency. Then the applicant will be asked to explain why the information was not provided as requested. Providing more information than requested can also, in some cases, lead to denial of a clearance, Smith said. For example, an applicant is required to report foreign travel in only the previous seven years. If the applicant provides information about travel before that date, it will be used by an investigator. Someone who traveled little to foreign nations in the last seven years but made many trips 10 years ago could find that those decade-old trips raise questions, she said. "You should read the questionnaire carefully," Smith said, recommending double-checking all dates and locating addresses for residences over the previous seven years. Making sure dates of duties match dates of residency is a frequent problem in applications from military members, she said. This is most often seen when the dates of assignment to a particular installation are longer than the dates of a residence in the same location, raising questions about where a service member lived for the missing months, Smith said.