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NATIONAL SECURITY ARCHIVE

Group says FBI thwarts information requests

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The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — If information were a river, the FBI would be a dam.

Two of 3 people who ask for FBI records under the Freedom of Information Act are told by the bureau that no such documents exist — a failure rate five times higher than at other major federal agencies, a private study finds.

The FBI is using an outdated and deliberately limited search process to avoid full compliance with the records law, the National Security Archive says. The archive is a private group that publishes declassified government documents and files many FOIA requests.

The archive awarded the FBI its Rosemary Award for the worst Freedom of Information Act performance by a federal agency. Named for

former President Richard M. Nixon's secretary, Rose Mary Woods, the award is given annually around Sunshine Week, when journalism organizations promote open government and freedom of information. Woods is best-known for re-enacting her claim to have accidentally erased 18 ½ minutes of a White House tape recording when she stretched to answer a phone.

"The FBI knowingly uses a search process that doesn't find relevant records," archive Director Tom Blanton said Thursday.

David Hardy, chief of the FBI's FOIA section, said the FBI's system is designed to support bureau investigations.

"We're not building a library," he said. "If you have something of meaning to the FBI, it's going to be there."