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Government Agencies Flooding Us With Reports of Every Kind

IF Americans aren't informed about our government, it isn't because of lack of communications. It might be that we can't assimilate the volume of information provided.

The U.S. government is the world's most prolific source of information from any angle. It moved into tenth place among the largest advertisers last year, spending \$110 million.

The Government Printing Office is the world's largest. Official estimates are that it turns out an average of almost 3,000 publications or periodicals monthly. The Oklahoman's Washington bureau says that every agency, commission and department of government issues some such material through this channel.

This does not necessarily include releases made from the agencies themselves. Fighting for existence, the Federal Energy Administration reportedly used 112 public relations aides to turn out 1,000 press releases in the first five months of 1976.

Some government publications are free and others are sold at nonprofit prices. A catalog titled "Selected Government Publications" is issued monthly by the Assistant Public Printer, also identified as the Superintendent of Documents.

A recent 16-page issue offered a 3-volume, 394-page report on "Siting Energy Facilities at Camp Gruber, Okla." for \$5.95; a bilingual activity book for children; a handbook on labor statistics; a survey of Scandinavian literature; and an old folks book called "Innovative Alternatives to Institutionalization."

The government also may be the world's largest magazine publisher.

A list of periodicals is unavailable, but agencies are prolific with this expensive type of printing.

Last fall, the Department of the Interior announced a new six times a year magazine called "MESA," acronym for its Mining Enforcement and Safety Administration. Subscriptions were offered at \$11.75 to anyone interested in "a safer, more efficient mining operation."

Of course, all of this is just for the purpose of informing the public and officials. Law prohibits agencies from spending money for printed or written matter designed to influence a member of Congress to favor or oppose legislation.

The law doesn't restrict congressmen from extending their remarks in The Congressional Record. Last year, this publication exceeded 34,000 pages, costing \$12 million. If anyone read all of it, he perused more than 100 pages every day of the year.

Government publications do not include those required by federal agencies and printed at private expense. A large oil company filed a special report that ran to a record 475,000 pages.

The Commission on Federal Paperwork concluded a series of hearings on the problem with a session in Oklahoma City. It has estimated federal agencies produce 10 billion sheets of forms and reports annually at a cost of \$40 billion, or \$4 a sheet.

With all of these outlets available, officials still "leak" information to news media, apparently because many believe that only those who tell "secrets" really are aware of what's happening in Washington. And the public has a right to know!