1. What is a Security Clearance?

A Personnel Security Screening / Security Clearance is a status granted to individuals who require access to PROTECTED and/or CLASSIFIED Canadian Government information or assets on a “NEED TO KNOW” basis for the purpose of employment or contractual requirements.

2. What are the levels of Clearance?

Security Clearances can be issued at the following levels: Reliability Status, Confidential, Secret and Top Secret. Employment agencies may request different levels of clearances based on the nature of the contract. This status is granted to an individual once all the required verifications are completed and their reliability and their loyalty to Canada have been verified. The most common levels are Reliability Status and Secret.

3. What is the difference between a Security Clearance and Reliability Status?

A Personnel Security Screening (Reliability Status) is a status granted to individuals who require on a “NEED TO KNOW” basis, access to PROTECTED information or assets. A Security Clearance (Confidential, Secret and Top Secret) is a status granted to individuals who require on a “NEED TO KNOW” basis, access to CLASSIFIED information or assets. A Reliability Status is a pre-requisite to obtaining a security clearance.

4. What is the approximate timeline to process a Reliability Status screening request?

The general wait time to process a Reliability Status is 2 to 8 weeks, provided that an out of country check and/or fingerprints are not required.

5. What issues may cause my clearance to take longer than 8 weeks to process?

The clearance process could be delayed if:

- You have lived outside of Canada in the past five years (this can increase your wait time to over 1 year)
- Fingerprints are required
- The application form was incomplete or completed incorrectly.

6. Can I contact PWGSC directly to inquire about my screening or clearance?

No. PWGSC will only accept inquiries from Company Security Officers or Designated Security Officials.

7. How can I verify if I have already been granted a security screening or clearance with PWGSC?

The Company Security Officer (CSO) or Alternate Company Security Officer (ACSO) from your prospective employer can verify with PWGSC if you hold a valid screening or clearance. PWGSC will only confirm your clearance status and level; no other personal information will be disclosed.
8. How can I obtain a copy of my screening or clearance?

A copy of your clearance may only be requested by the Company Security Officer or Alternate Company Security Officer of the company/organization responsible for your clearance.

9. Who is responsible for requesting security screenings or security clearances?

The Company Security Officer and/or the Alternate Security Officer of an organization registered in the Industrial Security Program are the only individuals authorized to request a security clearance or screening (an individual job seeker cannot apply for a clearance).

10. If I have a criminal record, can I still apply for a Security Screening or Clearance?

Yes. However, depending on the nature of the criminal record, the clearance request may take longer than 8 weeks to process. Fingerprints and additional information may be required to complete the clearance request.

11. Why do I need fingerprints?

Generally, fingerprints are required when the individual possesses a criminal record or has lived outside of Canada in the past 5 years. PWGSC may also request fingerprints if:

- Another person in Canada has the same name and same date of birth as you;
- Further details are required from Public Works to complete your background check.

12. Where can I get fingerprints done?

Commissionaires Ottawa
Colonnade Road
Telephone number: (613) 237-9061

International Fingerprinting Services
100 Argyle Avenue
(Behind the Ottawa Police Station)
Telephone number: (613) 237-9061

13. Why is PWGSC unable to conduct background inquiries for the country that I lived in during the last five years or from my country of birth?

Not all countries are willing to share an individual’s personal background information. In such cases, other steps are taken by PWGSC to determine the reliability of an individual.

14. Are newcomers to Canada eligible for a Security Screening and/or Security Clearance?

Newcomers to Canada are eligible for a security screening and/or security clearance. However, the individual must be a resident of Canada for the past 5 years, and hold valid Permanent Resident status or Canadian Citizenship. Individuals who do not meet these criteria may be granted a clearance, although limitation on access and certain types of information may occur.

15. Do I need a Security Clearance to work within the Federal Government?

All Federal Government jobs require either a Personnel Security Screening (Reliability Status) or a Security Clearance (Confidential, Secret or Top Secret).

For further information please visit:
http://www.tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca/