November 30, 2021

MEMORANDUM FOR: Assistant Chief Information Officers (ACIOs),
System Owners, and Authorizing Officials
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

FROM: Zachary Goldstein
NOAA Chief Information Officer and Director, High Performance Computing and Communications

SUBJECT: Sensitive Information in the SaaS and Email Interface

NOAA leverages many tools to effectively communicate, streamline operational capabilities, and improve workplace collaboration. Some of those tools include Software as a Service (SaaS) applications, such as Smartsheet, Microsoft Dynamics, and ServiceNow, that can improve workflows, automation, and reporting. Some of these applications generate notifications through dashboards and issue alerts that leverage NOAA’s existing email platform.

While the notifications, alerts, and dashboard structure provide improved communication and collaboration, they also result in the transmission of data contained within the SaaS application through NOAA’s email ecosystem. In some applications, notifications can be configured, while others may automatically send or post notifications to users with access to the underlying application data. As such, just like with email, there are restrictions on what can be shared in these transmissions: Controlled Unclassified Information (CUI) must be limited in both its access and transmission, both within and outside the NOAA domain.

Because of how some of these SaaS applications work, notifications and dashboard content can contain the clear-text application data itself. System Owners have an obligation to know the functionality of the applications operating within their systems. This includes understanding under what application configuration the data can be embedded into email alerts and notifications. If text from a SaaS text field can be sent automatically in notifications and alerts, and that information is going in a path other than, or in addition to, the NOAA Gateway, the information is not encrypted. As such, unless explicitly authorized, CUI should not be entered into NOAA SaaS platforms that automatically issue alerts or notifications.

As a reminder, regardless of the existence or path of the email notifications, all SaaS applications should only process or store information that is at or below the evaluated impact level of the SaaS application itself.
Thank you for your vigilance while utilizing approved SaaS applications in adhering to the underlying policies governing the protection, use, and storage of CUI and sensitive Personally Identifiable Information (PII).