



# OCIO – Information Technology Services *ITS Connections*

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## ITS Calendar

FSAFEDS Open Season	Nov. 14- Dec.12
ITS 1st Anniversary	Nov. 28
ITS All Hands CoVision Web Council (email with instructions will be sent)	Nov. 29 3:30-4:30 PM Eastern Time

## Contact Information

Please share with us your story ideas, comments, calendar items, ingenious solutions, questions or answers. E-mail us at:

ITSConnections@wdc.usda.gov

## Putting Service First: 1st ITS Management Conference, San Antonio



Photo: ITS Management and Leadership, including the Division Directors, Branch Chiefs, and Group Managers from Infrastructure Operations, Infrastructure Definition, Infrastructure Governance, Technical Support, WCTS and Administrative Management.

San Antonio and the Infrastructure Governance Division (IGD) hosted the first full gathering of ITS management – the division directors, branch chiefs, group managers, service line managers, ACIO Rich Roberts, and USDA CIO Dave Combs. The theme of the weeklong meeting was “Putting Service First”. As Rich Roberts explained it, “Service may be in our last name, but it is our first priority.”

With a far-flung organization like ITS, delivering service to our customers requires coordination across divisions, branches, and regions. This conference succeeded in a vital part of that process- face to face contact for many folks who hadn't met each other yet –with team building exercises, presentations from each division, and extensive questions and answers between ITS leadership and the branch chiefs and group managers.

Continued from page 1

George May, IGD-Organizational Development Branch Chief (Acting), emceed the event and kept things moving along. The topics covered everything from progress on staffing issues to indepth understanding about managing service calls and supporting customers better. One afternoon covered the service line process, with additional presentations from Greg Gage (Security), Nadim Ahmed (Telecom), and James Sargent (Hosting, Data Utility, and End-User services).

Bill Yoder, L3-Titan, facilitated a number of team building workshops that got people out of their chairs and interacting with colleagues throughout the conference hall... and thinking outside the box. Special breakout sessions provided workshops on civil rights, labor relations, staffing, performance topics, property management, and accounting codes (how the services we provide are processed).



Photo: Team building exercise. Left to right, Antonia Ayler-TSD/PA, Marilyn Miller-IOD/Hosting, Allison Campbell-TSD/LO, Tom Radermacher-TSD/MN, Rich Roberts-ACIO, Phil Rendina-IOD.

Direct communications was emphasized.

Rich Roberts and Dave Combs both gave special presentations and fielded questions. While Rich focused on how best

to provide service and what ITS needs to do internally to achieve that goal, Dave emphasized what an exceptional job ITS was doing and how it has become proof that we can provide world class and large scale support to our agency customers. There were daily exchanges between leadership and managers that focused on problem solving, clarifying policies, and addressing concerns from the field; and each day built on the lessons of the day before.



Photo: Dave Combs, CIO, USDA-OCIO, in an interactive presentation with ITS managers.

The last two days focused on the practical issues of how we can best work together across divisions and throughout the country. These intensive work sessions involved the Technical Support Division with the Infrastructure Operations and Infrastructure Definition Divisions – working out the details of day-to-day service, change management, and long-term planning. The outcome: ITS managers have met each other and worked together in a variety of ways, they better understand how our enterprise is designed to work, and are ready to put what they've learned into action.



# Louisiana's ITS Hurricane Story

From Frank Ramsey, Group Manager, TSD-Louisiana, photos by Paul Wallace, NRCS Public Affairs

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina came ashore in Louisiana and wreaked havoc across the entire New Orleans major metropolitan area and the southeast section of the state. The devastation to all life forms, to buildings, and to the



Photo: Brian Walker setting up Blackberry units for emergency operations.

physical infrastructure in that region of the state was unbelievable.

As a result of the widespread damage, the Louisiana ITS Staff was called upon to prepare the USDA State Offices Complex to house and support 20 displaced National Finance Center (NFC) employees, to

restore service in USDA's 14 affected Field Service Centers, and to set up a NRCS Emergency Operations Center (EOC) in Madisonville, LA.

ITS employees worked long, hard hours to string Cat 5E wire, install quad plates, punch down entire cable plants, install phone systems, and setup and configure emergency IT equipment for use by the Service Center Agencies (32 Blackberry units, 25 laptops with wireless connectivity, 5 HighEnd computers, EOC phone system, router, switch, 12 satellite phones, printers, and copiers).

On September 24, 2005, Hurricane Rita came ashore in

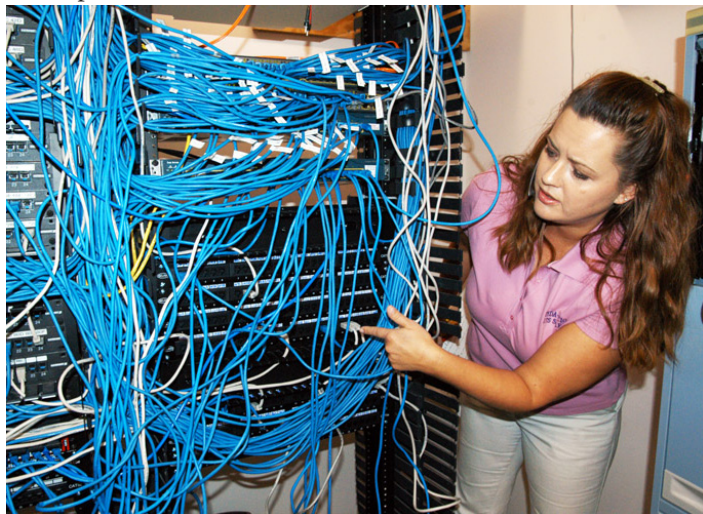


Photo: Tricia Hayes completing wiring cabinet connectivity.

Louisiana and wreaked havoc across the Lake Charles major metropolitan area and the southwest section of the state. The devastation was not as widespread as Katrina, but still quite substantial, and the area's infrastructure was severely damaged.

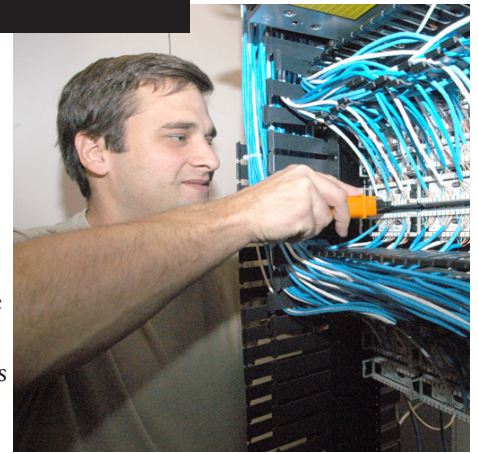


Photo: Scott Lindsay completing wiring cabinet "punchdowns".

This time the ITS Staff was called on to restore service in the 11 affected Field Service Centers and to set up another NRCS Emergency Operations Center in Oberlin, LA. Again, ITS employees worked long and hard to string wire, install quad plates, and setup, configure, and support emergency IT equipment for the Service Center Agencies (20 Blackberry

units, 15 laptops with wireless connectivity, 5 HighEnd computers, EOC phone system, router, switch, 5 satellite phones, printers, and copiers).

If that was not enough, the ITS Office in Alexandria, LA was burglarized early Wednesday morning of October 12, 2005 and seven emergency operations laptop computers were stolen. The investigation is ongoing. Hopefully, these laptops will be recovered.



Photo: Dixie Hebert, Theresa Harts, Phyllis Yearby, and Norma Cates setting up emergency computer systems.

Louisiana's ITS Staff has truly

lived through a hurricane horror story; and hurricane season is not over yet. What's next? Larry Brooks, Director of ITS' Technical Support Division, says, "It's bad luck to ask!"

One additional note: Our USDA-OCIO national leadership, Dave Combs and Rich Roberts, ITS division directors Larry Brooks, Carol Henson, and Scott Snover, along with Gary Davis, Mark Hirst, and Ande Mascarenas, have been absolutely fantastic in their guidance, service, and support during these emergencies.

# RD and ITS Help FEMA Get Families Home Again

From Infrastructure Operations, St. Louis

Diane Kamm, John Pretti, and other members of the Infrastructure Operations Division-Telecommunications Operations Branch and Technical Support Division-St. Louis (TSD-StL), managed a quick turnaround response to help families displaced by Hurricane Katrina reunite or get back home. The origins of the project started in September, when President Bush announced a program for paying travel expenses to reunify families separated by the disaster or to return families home.

To qualify, families must have their disaster claims registered in FEMA's National Emergency Management Information System, NEMIS. So the program had to connect securely into the FEMA-NEMIS database, be able to accommodate thousands of calls, and also allow conferencing and forwarding of calls.

Rural Development's St. Louis Centralized Service Center (CSC) has a call center that provides services for their Single Family Housing Direct Program. The center has several hundred agents who provide assistance in English and Spanish. RD offered to set up a call center for FEMA and provide about 40 skilled agents to field calls 7 days a week, from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. An agent validates a caller's claim, updates the NEMIS data base, and ensures that the call is conferenced to the approved travel agency to make travel arrangements.

ITS worked with the RD/CSC to gather requirements to

build the call flow the agents use to answer phones and simultaneously access the data base. This required some complex telecom telephony software. The system was developed and implemented in an unbelievable short time frame.

The access from RD to FEMA's intranet required a VPN tunnel to provide the secure communications. This was developed and tested by IOD-Telecom Operations. FEMA indicated that we were one of 2 groups to utilize such secure latent technical approaches. Also, a room was set up for the 40 agents that required an array of computers and phones. This was completed by the TSD-StL Large Office team in record time.

Prior to going live, FEMA-DHS made an unscheduled visit to St. Louis to check the VPN tunnels and our desktop security. Their comment to the RD-CSC management: ITS is "as good as it gets!" They were very pleased with our support, and appreciated our coming in on a Saturday for their unscheduled arrival. They also were pleased with the inherent security in our desktop images. There was definitely no time to hide issues. Our automated push of patches and virus definitions provided the needed level of security.

All in all, ITS-IOD and TSD came together quickly and effectively to work with RD, the CSC, and FEMA to make this successful and to help our fellow citizens and hurricane victims during this time of distress.

## Magic Stats - FY06 10/01-11/05

The Magic Merlin Ticket Report from the Infrastructure Operations Division-Customer Support Branch

**Total Tickets to Date (FY06) 25,173**

Software Support Requests	Number of Service Tickets
FSA	3,311
NRCS	709
RD	482
COTS	2,287
USDA	1,926
Other	2,013
<b>Total Software FY06 10/01-11/05</b>	<b>10,728</b>

Other Support Requests	Number of Tickets
Security Access Account Request (SAAR)	1,591
Self Service	3,284
Local System Administration	1,632
Other	3,695
<b>Total Other Support Requests</b>	<b>10,202</b>

Hardware Support Requests	Number of Service Tickets
Work Stations	888
Servers	180
Laptops	885
Printers	1,826
Other	464
<b>Total Hardware</b>	<b>4,243</b>



# Change, When Needed / Release, When Ready: Maintaining a Stable ITS Enterprise

“The goal of the InterOperability Lab (IO Lab) is to upgrade and improve the ITS infrastructure in an orderly manner that maintains a stable enterprise system for all ITS customers,” says Jack Zechman, Chief, Infrastructure Operations Division-Infrastructure Deployment Branch(IOD-IDB), “This requires a process for managing change so our customers can have a system that is both reliable and evolving. For instance, the XP Update2 deployment is delivering a needed set of new and upgraded applications for our end-users. We are now preparing Windows 2003 Server, another dramatic improvement to the ITS network.”

Preparing Windows 2003 for deployment is both a straightforward and intricate operation – a method of defining the intended change, assembling its parts, testing and refining it, and preparing it for release to our infrastructure. This article shows how Windows 2003 goes from an action item to a plan to implementation, and how IDB’s IO Lab assures the quality of the Change/Release Cycle.

## Request for Change (RFC)

Corey Wright and Katherine Ihli of the Infrastructure Definition Division-Architecture Definition Branch (ADB) initiated the *Request for Change (RFC)* for the migration of the Windows 2000 Active Directory Domain Controllers to Windows Server 2003.

Working as part of the Windows Server 2003 AD Migration Team and following the IO Lab certification process, the ADB is responsible for architecture definition specifications, assessing ongoing IT system requirements, and presenting recommendations for change. As *Change Initiators*, Corey and Katherine prepared the RFC, a formal proposal that makes the case for the change and lays out everything required to accomplish it.

Change to the IT infrastructure is a carefully calculated process, not one that just happens. The reason is when change simply happens, the results can be full of unintended consequences that crash networks and end-users’ computers alike. A change as innocuous as upgrading a web-browser plug-in can interfere with how a network computer accesses a major web-based business application; a windows upgrade for a productivity program can modify the operating system in a way that stops thousands of people from using their word processor; or adding a peripheral to a laptop can open a security vulnerability that can be exploited across the network.

In the case of Windows 2003, the RFC defined the anticipat-

**Windows Server 2003** improves the working environment for the end-users, improving reliability and performance so users can get their work done as efficiently as possible, as well as providing a more secure and manageable environment to make the lives of the IT staff easier.

**Active Directory** is the tool for managing the user and group identities and relationships that make up network environments. It has become a critical component of USDA’s day-to-day business processes and represents a considerable investment by USDA in information technology.

**Domain Controller (DC)** is the server that responds to security authentication requests (logging in, checking permissions, etc.) within the Windows Server domain. It is the server that essentially makes secure networking possible. (Based on Microsoft definitions)



Photo: Corey Wright and Katherine Ihli, Infrastructure Definition Division-Architecture Definition Division.

ed improvements and initial concerns; it also presented a test and implementation plan that focused on the delivery of an upgraded operating system that will allow enhanced service to continue at agency field service centers with minimal downtime during the upgrade.

While the Windows

2000 and Active Directory deployment has been a success for USDA, there have been challenges both to USDA and to Microsoft in scaling Windows 2000 and Active Directory in the current USDA Enterprise environment. These challenges are the key drivers for the deployment of Windows 2003 and the second generation of Active Directory. Although Windows 2003 and Active Directory leverage the current Windows 2000 architecture and infrastructure, there are specific areas of improvement that are critical to the success of the project and to achieve additional business benefits over and above Windows 2000 Active Directory. This upgrade will:

- Improve security
- Realize improvements in managing Active Directory, specifically in the area of replication management
- Increase availability by reducing Domain Controller down time

Change/Release, continued from Page 5

- Upgrade the current Active Directory infrastructure to better support new technologies such as:
  - *SMS (Systems Management Server)*, which allows delivery of critical business applications, security patches, and other network improvements direct to users.
  - *Exchange 2003*, the Microsoft messaging and collaboration server, is software that runs on servers that enables you to send and receive electronic mail and other forms of interactive communication through computer networks.
  - *Share Point Portal Server*, which lets us build intelligent portals that seamlessly connect users, teams, and knowledge so that people can interact with each other and take advantage of timely information relevant to their projects.
  - *Live Communication Server*, a real-time, enterprise-wide collaboration tool.
  - *Other associated technologies* that depend on Active Directory.

The Change/Release process makes sure that changes do not cause problems. This is a significant commitment of time, equipment and personnel resources, so every requested change must be evaluated and approved to certify the need for the change. Following approval, a change goes through:

- Integration, the *software build process* (including all customization, vulnerability scans, security improvements, and collateral materials required for use in the ITS environment)
- Testing ensures the change is harmless (this may result in improvements to the change) and that it will work as intended.

Then the change is prepared for release to the ITS community and our customers.

## Change Management

As Curt Anderson, a member of the Change Management team, describes it, “A Request for Change begins the whole process. There is a change initiator, who could be a customer who wants a new application; it could be a change manager/developer, like David Pfaffenberger, whose team prepared XP Update2 for deployment as part of an ongoing series of improvements; it could be part of a service level agreement that defines when hardware or software is replaced; or it could be an expedited patch to protect against a security threat.”

With Windows 2003, change was driven by the ITS Infrastructure Definition Division-Architecture Definition Branch, and the many key ITS service line areas, in order to improve overall service to our customers.

There are three main categories of *changes*:

- *Major changes*, like the XP Update2, which directly improve the productivity of all ITS customers or Windows Server 2003 which, as an operating system to be installed on all ITS’ 3000+ servers, improves the productivity of the whole network.
- *Intermediate changes*, such as NetShield, a fairly straightforward security application for network servers.
- *Minor changes*, such as a patch that is provided by a trusted vendor and has a simple test for interoperability on our systems.

“Minor changes are reviewed for technical merit and once approved usually proceed through the established processes in the IDB Interoperability Lab,” Curt explains, “all inter-

### Change/Release Glossary

- Change Initiator:** The person or group who are behind the suggested change.
- Request for Change Proposal:** This document explains why a change (hardware or software) is needed and includes copies of the pertinent software or samples of the hardware required, all supporting documentation, and a project plan for testing and deployment. Although the RFC is usually led by an IO Lab Change Manager, it also includes input from all the teams likely to be involved in developing, testing, implementing, deploying, and supporting the change.
- Change Control Board (CCB):** CCB is the group that reviews all Requests for Change. Approval is required for them to proceed to the IO Lab Development Team.
- Vulnerability Review:** An iterative series of vulnerability assessment scans and security improvements to the change item.

mediate and major changes are scheduled for review by the Change Control Board (CCB). A change discussed at CCB is only approved by a unanimous vote. Once approved, it is moved to integration, then testing, and finally, the release phase.”

If the RFC is complete and the need justifies the change, it is accepted; if the RFC is missing key elements, it will be returned to the initiator and the RFC can be resubmitted when complete. The change can also be rejected if it isn’t appropriate. If the RFC is categorized as minor or standard it can be approved, prioritized, and scheduled by the change manager for integration and testing.

Change/Release, continued from page 6.

Emergency changes get fast-tracked but follow the same processes in a shortened time frame. Emergency changes are in response to a significant loss of service to the environment or to an enterprise-wide vulnerability attack. ITS uses the change/configuration/release processes accurately and efficiently in order to minimize the need of emergency changes.

## Integration

After an RFC is approved, the package is handed over to Configuration Management and the Release Manager assigned to the project. The release manager is responsible for ensuring each of the steps from integration to distribution and installation is handled correctly.

On enterprise-wide projects, the integration process usually begins with a team consisting of people from various branches and divisions within ITS. For the Windows Server 2003 project, the 'Windows Server 2003 AD Migration Team' was created and is being led by IDD-ADB. As part of the project's change materials, this team determined its:

- Functional requirements
- Architecture design
- Security configuration documents.

The IO Lab uses these documents as the starting point for the Windows Server 2003 *build* that will be deployed to the environment after numerous rounds of enhancements and tests. Many factors are evaluated during the creation of the build:

- Various configuration settings of the operating system
- Impact of the operating system build on existing supported products that rely on it such as Microsoft Operations Manager (MOM) and Server Update Services (SUS)
- The default services hosted on the OS build.

The build creation process is an ongoing, collaborative effort between the Integration and Security functional areas of the IO Lab. For the Windows Server 2003 build, the IDB assigned Carl Chernisky as the Lead Integrator and John Vanmeter as the Security Integrator.

Once the package is delivered to Integration by Configuration Management, the Release Manager coordinates two parallel processes:



Photo: Left to right, Barry Hodge-Integration/Security, Carl Chernisky-Lead Integrator, and Curt Anderson-Change Management. (Infrastructure Deployment Branch/Infrastructure Operations Division)

- Work with the Lead Integrator and the Security Integrator begins on a cycle of build releases, vulnerability scans and reports, and build improvements to achieve an optimized balance between security and functionality while ensuring that the project requirements are met.
- Simultaneously, an effort is underway to produce and revise Installation Guides, Rollback Plans, and Support documents.

Advance work also occurs with the Testing functional area of the IDB, led by Debbie Ogle. She helps prepare a Unit Test Plan that maps to a matrix specified by the Functional Requirements document. This matrix and the related Unit Test Plan's Test Cases ensure that the Integrator has captured all of the necessary elements and that all functional requirements will be tested.

## The Security Vulnerability Scan

The Security Team, led by Mary Wilson and Don Michelli, performs a vulnerability analysis as early as possible in the integration cycle to make sure that the change is safe. "The IO Lab shifted the security review to earlier in the integration cycle because it is much more efficient to spot vulnerabilities and fix them, if possible, so the improved change item is what goes to testing", Mary, who manages the logistics, said.



Change/Release, continued from page 7.



Photo: Left to right, Don Michelli-Security, John Vanmeter-Windows 2003 Project/ Security Integrator, & Mary Wilson-Security, (Infrastructure Deployment Branch/Infrastructure Operations Division)

This Vulnerability Assessment is a three stage process:

- Scan to identify vulnerabilities
- The Integration team implements fixes to identified vulnerabilities
- Then the new build is rescanned to verify the vulnerabilities have been addressed.

Don’s specialty is the technical analysis. He says, “The vulnerability scan uses various tools to search for possible risks to the ITS enterprise if a hardware or software change is made. For hardware, the issue is if it creates an opening in the network – such as a wireless device or a printer/fax; for software it is a question of probing for known vulnerabilities that open the system to hackers or viruses. The issue of security has evolved since the advent of web-based business applications, and some tools or plug-ins have inherent weaknesses; on the other hand, some applications can’t work properly without those tools or plug-ins.

Don and John Vanmeter, whose specialty is security group policy and firewall configuration, describe the security review as “an iterative process of scanning for vulnerabilities, analyzing results, suggesting improvements to security, followed by Carl’s new build, and continuing cycles of reviews, improvements, and integration until the build is ready for the next stage: testing.”

A risk assessment is made concerning the change, along with recommendations. If a permanent fix isn’t

possible then procedures for users or administrators may be required to minimize any risks. All parties to the change sign off on a Risk Acceptance Report and agree to the mitigation requirements.

“We all take the responsibility for securing pre-deployment projects very seriously,” Mary says, “if an exploit is released into the environment, it will place the entire network at risk. The goal is to ensure that all products that are deployed by the Infrastructure Deployment Branch are secured without breaking any functionality required by customers.” Mary went on to say, “It used to be that you could change something and all you worried about was your own system. Everything is connected now. And everybody is buying into keeping the system safe.”

**Windows 2003 Migration Team  
(October 2005)**

**Change Initiation/Management Team:**

Corey Wright & Katherine Ihli,  
Infrastructure Definition Division-Architecture  
Definition Branch

Integration

Curt Anderson, IOD-IDB-IO Lab-Change Management

**Integration & Security**

Barry Hodge, IOD-IDB-IO Lab-Integration & Security

Carl Chernisky, IOD-IDB-IO Lab-Integration

John Vanmeter, IOD-IDB-IO Lab-Security

**Testing:**

Debbie Ogle, IOD-IDB-IO Lab-Testing & Operations

Jay Szlamowicz, IOD-IDB-IO Lab-Testing

**More Integration**

Once the optimized build is ready with its new security features, other improvements, and all accompanying materials and documentation, Change Management checks the final package into a version control system that tracks all future changes.

When Integration & Security is ready to hand over the package to Configuration Management and the Release Manager, it is prepped for a Test Readiness Review (TRR). Conducted by the Release Manager and the Testing Team members involved in the project, the TRR certifies the project (and its software, hardware, and testing network) is set for the next phase.



## Testing

The testing plan matrix specifies all hardware platforms the change must be tested on, as well as applications it must be tested with. A security patch might be tested on a few servers; a large software application change like XP Update2 was tested on seventeen different end-user computing systems; the current Windows 2003 functional requirements document could possibly generate 20 plus different tests. Debbie Ogle, in her other role as manager of Testing, has reviewed the testing plan and arranged the logistics.

For Windows 2003, the interoperability test runs a set of scripts to see how the operating system works on each type of ITS server and how they interact with other parts of the network such as databases, enterprise applications, and end-user machines.

When approved by Testing, large-scale products such as Windows 2003 will go through a post-test review. This review will analyze the results of the testing and determine if any requirements that failed testing should be repaired or can be handled via documentation. When the change has passed Testing it is ready for post-test planning to prepare the final phase of change/release: distribution, and installation.



Photo: Debbie Ogle, Technical Manager for Testing and Operations and Jay Szalmowicz, Testing Team (Infrastructure Operations Division-Infrastructure Deployment Branch).

### Testing Overview

Jay Szlamowicz, Testing, describes a highly disciplined and precise process, "that is needed because key elements of the operating system are shared by many applications. If one application mutates part of the system, it can crash all the other applications. To avoid that possibility, testing is required prior to adding any new software or upgrade into the shared environment."

For instance, typical testing steps for a new workstation application include:

1. A clean CCE machine is built.
2. A "snap shot" of the machine status is made.
3. The application is installed.
4. A new snap shot is taken and analyzed to see what changes occurred, such as new folders or code. It is compared with the original to make sure the changes are acceptable.
5. The application is used to see if it works properly and if it doesn't disrupt the underlying system.
6. A new snapshot is taken.
7. The application is uninstalled.
8. Another snap-shot is taken and analyzed to make sure it actually uninstalled cleanly and neither left anything inappropriate behind or removed anything that needs to stay.
9. A report is run to check for any violations in the operating system and an evaluation either recommends advancing to an interoperability test or rejects the product.

## Post-Test Planning, Distribution, and Installation

The last set of pre-release activities for Windows 2003 will include final packaging, revised documentation delivered to the ITS field teams, teleconferences with TSD, Customer Support and Tier III IDB/IO lab staff, teleconferences with the customers, generating communications such as Newsflashes, and reviewing the distribution and installation plan. The Change/Release and Integration

teams coordinate planning with the Technical Support Division (which deploys all new hardware or software), and the Customer Support Branch, which will work with TSD to support customers' change issues.

Change/Release, continued from page 9.

In the case of new hardware, it is distributed to TSD locations for preparation and delivery to end-users. For end-user software, like XP Update2, CD install packages are distributed to TSD teams for manual installations, or loaded onto servers for remote or automated installations. This provides TSD some flexibility – since some users are better served having someone on-site. A fully automated System Management Server for software installations is being planned for the near future.

Windows 2003 Server, though, will be installed on every server in the ITS network. In most cases, because of the complexity of such a large upgrade, a phased approach is likely. After deployment to the field, IO lab teams continue to monitor the enterprise. Security maintains a Watch Desk that looks for possible security issues; IO Lab-Operations hosts the Level 3 Help Desk team that supports and monitors infrastructure systems such as servers, controllers, and the Active Directory.

*Change when needed, release when ready* has become the proven methodology of the IDB Interoperability Lab in support of the whole ITS infrastructure and our customers. It is based in the common sense approach of Microsoft Operations Framework which is based upon ITIL\* and has evolved into an effective process for implementing change to a complex and diverse enterprise used by over 65,000 ITS customers and partners in the service of millions of farmers and rural Americans.

\*ITIL is an international initiative that has become a widely accepted approach to IT Service Management.

- Current D&I Projects**
- SMS
  - Production Test synchronization
  - Enterprise Group Creation
  - Diskeeper 9.0.511
  - HP Rack & Power Manager
  - Print Spooler relocation
  - Veritas Backup Exec Patches
  - GroupShield for Exchange
  - XP Update 2 (deployed)
  - HP Systems Insight Manager (SIM)
  - Host Integration Server (HIS)
  - SQL DBA Permissions
  - Cyber Ark
- Future D&I Projects**
- File Decompression
  - Windows XP SP2
  - ArcSDE 9.1
  - Group Policy clean-up & base lining
  - Helpdesk Administrative Roles

Pictured on the right are 55 of the 75 people who make up the IO Lab staff which makes the Change/Release process possible and effective.

Listed in alphabetical order: Sha-teel Alam, Curt Anderson, Daniel Astier, Steve Blahut, Stephanie Blanc, Stephanie Brumbaugh, Rom Chan, Nick Cheng, Carl Chernisky, Donna Chernisky, Andy Clemenko, Fabrice Corbatto, Vic Cserer, Fred Diehl, Chuck Fleury, Jesse Fleury, Rebecca Gomes, Beverly Gray, Bill Green, Russell Hamblin, Jason Hayes, Mary Haygood, Barry Hodge, Marcus Hulings, David Hyde, Nick Jedinak, Jeff Jorgensen, Dave Kent, Steve Kruse, Ross LiCausi, Eric Liu, Juanita Major, Andrew Martin, Cookie Matthews, Don Michelli, Debbie Ogle, Akshai Prakash, Shirley Price, Dion Reid, Golam Sayeed, Suman Sharma, Mark Sieg, Mike Sohns, Mike Starin, Larry Scott, Jay Szlamowicz, Scott Tweed, Mario Vasquez, Mary Wilson, John Vanmeter, Guy York, Jack Zechman.



Not in the picture: Charles (Benny) Beniquez, Ivan Foldvik, Glenn Freeman, Rich Garcia, Nate Harris, Lisa Howard, Mike Ingle, Sharon Jenkins, Marcia Kemp, Bill Mackenzie, Tom Oaks, Donald Parker, Dev Patel, David Pfaffenberger, Kevin Pressley, Ivan Santana, Igor Selivanov, Chand Singla, Robert (Bob) Smith, Lou Swerda, Chris Wong

## ITS Anniversary - All Hands Teleconference/ WebCouncil

The first anniversary of ITS is coming up. To celebrate, Rich Roberts, ITS ACIO, has organized a telephone & web-based All Hands conference on November 29 (3:30-4:30 Eastern Time). We will assess how we have been doing and how we can do things better. Unlike customary teleconferences, this will be an interactive CoVision WebCouncil meeting that allows people who are listening on the phone (and not just

those who are talking) to participate actively by contributing their candid comments and ideas on-line and in real-time, as well as by phone. The written comments are entered anonymously, but they are available for everyone to read and respond to. More information about how to call in and log-on will be sent by email.



**Admin Notes: Topics of Interest from the Administrative Management Division**

## The 2006 FSAFEDS Open Season begins next week!

In case you missed the email of November 7, FSAFEDS has implemented several program enhancements. It's never been a better time to take advantage of the FSAFEDS Program! Don't miss out! Enroll during Open Season, November 14 to December 12, 2005.

**Attention Current 2005 Participants: If you want to participate in 2006 you MUST RE-ENROLL. Enrollments DO NOT carry forward year-to-year. See [www.FSAFEDS.com](http://www.FSAFEDS.com) (<https://www.fsafeds.com/fsafeds/index.asp>) .**



Photo: Gretchen Stein, Ph. D.

## EAP- Help for Personal Problems

*Gretchen M. Stein, Ph.D., President and CEO, The Sand Creek Group, Ltd.*

At any given time, it is estimated that 25% of a workforce is dealing with a personal problem that may affect their work performance. The loss of a loved one, relationship problems, depression, financial concerns, and chemical dependency are just

a few of the common problems that impact employees.

If you are that one in four dealing with a problem, immediate professional help is available to you at no cost. On October 1, 2005, the USDA Office of Chief Information Officer (OCIO) contracted with the Sand Creek Group to provide a full service employee assistance program (EAP) for its employees and their dependents.

Many of you may already know the Sand Creek Group; they have been providing EAP services to the U.S. Department of Agriculture for over a decade. Recently, Open Rating, the Past Performance Evaluation Service for Dun and Bradstreet, gave Sand Creek an outstanding overall performance rating of 95 on the 100 point scale. For professionalism of the company staff they received a 99. Customer service and responsiveness were rated 97. Sand Creek is an organization you can trust for high quality help delivered quickly and professionally. As the research suggests, Sand Creek truly is one of the best.

### To Start Getting Help

Simply call 1-888-243-5744 and identify yourself as an OCIO employee. You will be asked a few questions so that the phone counselor can understand the type of help you will need. The phone counselor will then match your need with a counselor working in your community who specializes in finding solutions to your problem. All you need to do is schedule an appointment to see that counselor face-to-face. Most employees receive appointments within 2 working days, depending on their schedules. If you need immediate help, let the phone counselor know, so he or she can get you in right away.

### Confidential

The services of the EAP are confidential. No one will know you have used the program unless you tell them. No reports go to OCIO that would identify you or a family member using this program. If you have questions about confidentiality, ask the Sand Creek phone counselor for a full explanation.

### No Cost

There is no cost to you or your dependents for this service. It is a short term counseling program. If you need more than six sessions, you will be referred for help outside the EAP. The EAP is free service. Services beyond these sessions may be covered under your health plan and are your financial responsibility.

### Professionalism

All of Sand Creek counselors seeing OCIO employees have at least a Masters degree, a license to practice in their profession (as psychologists, social workers, marriage and family counselors, chemical dependency counselors, etc.) and many years of experience. In fact, the average Sand Creek counselor has over 17 years of clinical experience.

### Support for Supervisors

If you are a supervisor, and want to seek new options for ways to help employees who are troubled, please give Sand Creek a call. Supervisor consultation is available to you with no limit on the number of calls you make. Do you have an employee who needs help but you don't know where to start? Let Sand Creek help you.

### Crisis Help Available Always

Sand Creek's phones are staffed by professional counselors 24 hours a day, every day of the year. If you are in crisis, call anytime.

### Have More Questions?

Please call the EAP at 1-888-243-5744 to ask any questions you might have about the program or to schedule an appointment.

**Answers to common questions about EAP are on the next page.**

# Q & A's about OCIO's Employee Assistance Program

## **What is an EAP?**

An EAP is an employee counseling program designed to help employees and their family members find help with their problems. The program is professional, at no cost to the people using it, and totally confidential.

## **Does my problem have to be related to work?**

No, not at all. In fact, the majority of people come in for help with problems that have nothing to do with work. The most common problems people come to Sand Creek for concern their relationship with their partner or children.

## **What kinds of problems can I get help for through the EAP?**

The EAP counselor is available to help with any problem that is bothering you. Besides relationship problems and parenting issues mentioned above, we can help with divorce and separation issues, alcohol or chemical use problems, work concerns, loss and grief, financial crisis, depression and anxiety, and many other concerns that affect your well-being.

## **Why would my employer want to pay for a program to help me with my personal problems?**

There is a good reason why OCIO has invested in an EAP. Employees who are free from personal troubles are better able to focus on their work and be more productive. It's a win-win situation.

## **Under what circumstances might my supervisor be involved in my use of the program?**

Sometimes, if employees are not performing their job well, a supervisor may suggest they go to see an EAP counselor for help. The program is voluntary, however, and it is completely up to you to seek or accept the help available. Also, note that the EAP counselor will not release information without a signed, written consent from you.

With your permission, the supervisor would be made aware of two things: 1) whether or not you made and kept an appointment with a counselor and 2) if you are or are not following the counselor's recommendations. The employer's concern in these cases is that job performance and/or attendance problems improve. They have no desire to have knowledge of or interfere in your personal life.

## **Who pays the cost of this counseling?**

All EAP services are free to you and your family. If the EAP counselor refers you to other community resources for longer-term or specialty assistance, these costs may be covered by your health benefits program. Costs not covered by insurance may be your responsibility. However, the EAP counselor will make every effort to minimize costs to you.

## **How do I get in touch with a counselor?**

Simply call 1-888-2HELP44 (1-888-243-5744) and a counselor will talk with you and locate a counselor to see you close to your work or home. Help is only a phone call away.

## **I was already seeing a counselor when the EAP provider switched to Sand Creek. Do I have to start over with a new counselor?**

Sand Creek understands employees typically don't want to switch counselors in such circumstances. If you are faced with this, we suggest you ask your current counselor to contact Sand Creek. Counselors often work with more than one EAP provider, so the counselor may already be a part of Sand Creek's network. If not, Sand Creek will encourage the counselor to join Sand Creek's network, so that you do not have to change.



# ITS @ USDA IT Showcase

From Phil Rendina, Deputy Director, Infrastructure Operations Division

Members of the OCIO ITS Infrastructure Operations Division (IOD) attended the 8th Annual USDA IT Showcase held October 18th and 19th at the patio of the Jamie Whitten Federal Building in Washington, DC, USDA's headquarters. In coordination with this year's Showcase theme of Enterprise Architecture, IOD highlighted its recent accomplishments in the area of server hardware consolidation tools, specifically the use of VMWare.

VMWare is a third party product that allows servers to be run in a virtual infrastructure environment, and provides the software for partitioning, consolidating and managing servers in large mission-critical environments. This product is ideally suited for enterprise Data Centers, and IOD has worked to minimize the total cost of ownership of computing infrastructure by increasing resource utilization and using hardware-independent virtual machines to maximize administration flexibility. IOD's elaborate booth (produced with help from Cheryl Newton and Menelaos Kotsis, IGD) included effective graphics and a three-stage multimedia presentation that showed how this works:

1. A project already completed using VMWare
2. A project that is currently in development
3. A live demo of the capabilities of the product itself.

*Part 1* focused around the migration of FSA's legacy Novell network operating system and its move to the SCA/CCE standardized operating platform. The consolidation and virtualization of server hardware in the Kansas City Data Center, showed how this product was used to gain a:

- 76% reduction in overall hardware requirements
- 87% reduction in electrical requirements
- 69% reduction in floor space requirements
- 95% reduction in air/cooling requirements.

*Part 2* provided insight into how server virtualization will be used during the upcoming consolidation of the three SCA Agency WebFarms into a primary and secondary site location configuration. ITS IOD is currently working on the WebFarm infrastructure requirements to make this geographical and hardware consolidation a success. This slideshow allowed guests to view diagrams of how these efforts will be accomplished.

*Part 3*, the final stage of the presentation, provided a hands-on demonstration of some of the capabilities of the product, including Virtual Center, VMotion, and P2V Assistant (physical to virtual). Guests were able to actually view live instances of these products being used right on location.

The exposition attracted many visitors and was well received by USDA management, SCA partnerships, and many interested guests outside of the tri-agencies.

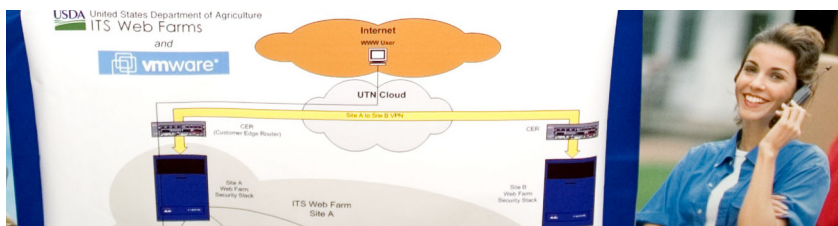


Photo: Detail of ITS-IOD booth illustrating the VM concept.



Photo: The delegation from the OCIO ITS Infrastructure Operations Division represents ITS at the OCIO Exposition at USDA Headquarters in Washington, DC. Left to right: Greg Gordon, Robert Marks, Phillip Rendina, Jim Shrader, and Mark Ortiz.

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