HR Broadcast

NEW FEATURE ON THE WEB

The Human Resources Division has put together what we hope you'll find to be a useful tool in helping you manage and respond to actions, activities and information related to a variety of HR-related functional areas. For example, what type of personnel actions do I need to remember to initiate each month? When does the annual reminder on "use or lose" annual leave come out? When are those financial disclosures reports due? The HR Calendar provides you with this and lots more information! The Calendar will be kept up-to-date as information changes and will be available on our website (http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/hrd/hr_calendar) for easy access by all our customers. We hope you will find this helpful!!

Be sure and check the calendar for the months of April, May, and June!!!

Coming in the July Issue:

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Performance Appraisals

Performance appraisals are to be completed 30 days after the performance rating cycle has ended and should be forwarded to Minneapolis Processing Unit for entry into the NFC database. Please forward **only the summary rating to Minneapolis. Do not forward any attachments such as the performance standards**. Information on performance appraisals can be found in the following directives: 4430.5 (new 4 tier system); 4430.4 (5 level system); AMS Directive 4430.1 and GIPSA Directive 4430.1

SPOT AWARDS

The Department's Office of Human Capital Management has increased the maximum net amount of a spot award from $500 to $750. The criteria for spot awards remain the same. The same level of justification required for spot awards in the past is also sufficient for the new maximum amount. For USDA's Criteria for the Spot Awards Program, see http://www.usda.gov/da/employ/webSpotAwards.htm.

Great Job!

The Benefits Buzz

Designating Beneficiaries

Who will receive your benefits when you die? Do you know that a will has no effect on the payment of your Federal benefits? Have you completed designation of beneficiary forms for your Federal benefits? Are they up to date? Have you experienced marriage, divorce, death of a family member, or addition of a child since you completed your designations?

Your Federal benefits are paid in the normal order of precedence, which is:

- To your designated beneficiary;
- If none, to your widow or widower;
- If none, to your child or children, with the share of any deceased child distributed among the descendants of that child;
- If none, to your surviving parent(s);
- If none, to the duly appointed executor or administrator of your estate;
- If none, to other next of kin who are entitled under the laws of the domicile of the insured at the date of death.

It is NOT necessary to file designation forms if you want to follow the normal order of precedence. If you DO file designation forms, you MUST keep them up to date.

What benefits may be designated, and what forms are used?

- Your final salary, unpaid annual leave, unpaid awards, travel vouchers or any other monies due from your agency: SF-1152, Unpaid Compensation of Deceased Civilian Employee.
- Federal Employees Group Life Insurance: SF-2823.
- Thrift Savings Plan: TSP-3
- Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) contributions, when no survivor annuity is payable: SF-3102 or
- Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) contributions, when no survivor annuity is payable: SF-2808

Let's look at an example of why designations should be kept current:

Jack, a Federal employee, completed all designation forms when he was first hired, naming his wife Amy. Later, he divorced, and married Betty. He changed his life insurance designation to name his new wife, but he neglected to submit the other designations. Later, he divorced, and married Cathy. This time he did not change any of his designations. Jack died. How were his benefits paid? Amy, his first wife, received his unpaid compensation (final salary, annual leave, travel voucher), because the Designation of Beneficiary for Unpaid Compensation was still valid. She also received his Thrift Savings Plan account because of that designation. Betty, his second wife, received his life insurance, because that designation was still valid. Cathy, his third wife, received a monthly survivor benefit from the CSRS because she was married to him at the time of his death, and his divorce orders did not specify dividing the CSRS retirement to his ex-wives.

This, unfortunately, is based on a true story. We will never know if Jack intended to be so generous to his ex-wives.

One of the tasks of your Human Resources Benefits Specialists is to assist the beneficiaries in filing claims once an employee has died. We have seen several variations of this type of negligence over the years. Designations, once filed, are valid until new designations are filed.

If you choose to file designation forms, complete them carefully, sign them, obtain two witness signatures, and mail them according to each form's instructions. The SF-2808 is maintained by the Office of Personnel Management in Boyers, Pennsylvania. The TSP-3 is maintained by the Thrift Savings Plan in Birmingham, Alabama. All other designations are maintained in your Official Personnel Folder in Human Resources, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Be sure to keep copies of your designation forms with your important papers. For more information, and to obtain blank forms, go to http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/benefits/designation_beneficiary.html
or to:
http://www.opm.gov/insure/designations/index.asp

Changes in Submitting
Background Investigation Paperwork

☑ No more hard copy SF-85, SF-85P, or SF-86 paper questionnaires;

☑ Changes in HR Recruitment Select Letter verbiage;

☑ Incorporating the Background Investigation Process into the New Employee Orientation Procedures and adding an HR AD-1197 Supplemental form to the new hire paperwork submission process

THREE major changes have taken place in the background investigation process since the first of the year.

First - since January 1, 2007, we are fully operational with OPM's e-QIP system for all background investigations; replacing the hard copy paper questionnaires (SF-85s, SF-85Ps, and SF-86s) with an electronic version instead.

Second - the paragraph relating to background investigations in the HR Recruitment select letters has been changed to read:

All employees in the Federal Service require some level of background investigation, screening, and/or security clearance. Shortly after you have completed your 'New Employee On-Line Orientation' you will be contacted by a member of the HRD Personnel Security Staff with further instructions for meeting this requirement. For additional information please review the "General Questions and Answers about OPM Background Investigations" at the following web link:

http://www.opm.gov/Products_and_Services/Investigations/FAQs.asp

Third - Program administrative offices no longer have to be responsible for providing or administering the background investigation questionnaires for their employees. The HR Personnel Security staff will do this for you. Simply follow the instructions as outlined on the Facilitator's Checklist of the HR New Employee Orientation web link. (http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/manuals_guides/new_employee_orientation/checklist.html)

These changes also brought about the implementation of a new HRO AD-1197 Supplemental form which allows the Personnel Security Staff to initiate employees into OPM's secure e-QIP portal for completing their questionnaires on-line. This improvement process removes the guesswork surrounding which questionnaire is required of the employee and eliminates the duplication of effort when an employee completes the wrong form.

HRO AD-1197 Supplement
PERSONNEL SECURITY DOCUMENTS

TO: DATE: _____

    USDA, APHIS, MRPBS, HRD
    Attn: Processing Associate
    Butler Square, 100 North 6th Street
    Minneapolis, MN 55403-1588

FROM:

    Program/Region:_____

    Duty Station: _____

    Administrative Point of Contact:_____

    Phone Number: _____

EMPLOYEE'S FULL NAME:	
SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER:	
DATE OF BIRTH:	
PLACE OF BIRTH:	
e-MAIL ADDRESS:	
SUPERVISOR'S NAME:	
SUPERVISOR'S GOV'T e-Mail:	

The following forms **must** be attached to this supplemental form and submitted with the employee's new hire paperwork as instructed in the MRPBS, Human Resources Guide to Submitting New-Hire Paperwork:

    _____   **AD-1197, Request for USDA Identification (ID) Badge**
    _____   Copies of Two Identity Source Documents *(one being a photo ID)*
    _____   Two Completed Fingerprint Cards (SF-87s) **MAIL SEPARATELY** if necessary – do **NOT** fax

Upon receipt of all information, a member of the Personnel Security Staff will validate the level of background investigation required of the employee's position, initiate them into OPM's secure on-line e-QIP portal and will provide further instructions by means of e-mail for completing the electronic questionnaire. The employee's Supervisor and administrative point of contact as noted above will be cc'd on all electronic communications if e-mail is available.

<u>TOP 21 REASONS FOR E-QIP DELAYS</u>

The Office of Personnel Management's e-QIP (**e**lectronic **Q**uestionnaire for **I**nvestigative **P**rocessing) has now been in process for two years and recently completed the third and final phase of adding the SF-85 (NACI) Questionnaires to the on-line system. e-QIP replaces the paper version of the security investigative process with an on-line (internet based) secure portal for the investigative process. The e-QIP system comes with many challenges. For effectiveness and efficiency OPM is continuing its efforts to enhance the system by testing new phases and versions of the product. We ask for your patience as we move forward with the full implementation of this system.

All investigative questionnaires (SF-85, SF-85P and the SF-86) are now available through e-QIP. We will no longer accept the paper version of these forms.

We have identified the *Top 21 Reasons for e-QIP Processing Delays.* We hope by identifying the top reasons for processing delays in e-QIP it will help e-QIP users when accessing or using the system.

For more information on Personnel Security, please visit our web site at http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/hr.html. In addition, you may contact Thomas Lewis, Tiana Richardson or Dru Dukart of the Personnel Security Staff for further questions on e-QIP and security.

OPM also has several web links which provide additional information. Check them out!
http://www.opm.gov/e-qip/faq.asp, and http://www.opm.gov/e-qip/reference.asp

Top 21 Reasons for e-QIP Processing Delays

1) **Read instructions *THOROUGHLY* in the email notification and e-QIP instructions sent to you by the Minneapolis Personnel Security staff member. Please provide all required forms as indicated.**

2) **Faxing of forms.** OPM requires original forms, with original signatures and dates. In some cases, faxes are acceptable; however, **only** if OPM or the Department indicates to do so.

3) **SF-87 Fingerprint Cards** - These forms are required for **federal** employees. The fingerprint cards are often not received by the Personnel Security Section,

4) **FD-258 Applicant Fingerprint Cards** - These cards are required for federal **contractors** only. The fingerprint cards are often not received by the Personnel Security Section.

5) **Fingerprint Cards - How do I get them?** Typically if you are in the Minneapolis area, you can get forms from our office. Contact Tom Lewis at Area Code (612) 336-3296, e-mail: Thomas.L.Lewis@aphis.usda.gov or Tiana Richardson at (612) 336-3294, e-mail: Tiana.A.Richardson@aphis.usda.gov. If in the Riverdale, MD or Washington, DC area you may contact Keisa Brown at Area Code (301) 734-5651 or e-mail: Keisa.D.Brown@aphis.usda.gov. Forms are also available by ordering them through GSA or contacting your Program's administrative office.

6) **What versions of the fingerprint cards are acceptable?** Currently OPM has revised the Standard Form 87/87A, Fingerprint Chart. The new revision date is April 2006. However, previous versions are acceptable as well.

7) **Where do I get fingerprinted?** Typically if you're in the Minneapolis area, you can get fingerprinted at the Minneapolis HR Personnel Security Section. Please contact Tom Lewis at the number provided above. If in the Washington, DC area you may contact Keisa Brown as directed above to set up an appointment. If in the Fort Collins, CO area please contact Lin Chambers at Area Code (970) 494-7204 and if in the Raleigh, NC office, please go to the North Carolina State University's Campus Police Department. Please contact Area Code (919) 515-3000 by appointment or walk ins are accepted. Fingerprinting is done on Tuesdays 9:00 AM – 4:00 PM only. A current campus identification card and two fingerprint cards are required. The service provided by the North Carolina State University's Campus Police Department is free of charge for all students, faculty, staff members and anyone on the campus. Outside of the areas mentioned above, fingerprinting can be administered at a nearby government office free of charge or at a police station for a fee.

8) **How do I get reimbursed for the fingerprints if taken at a police station?** Unless in Raleigh, NC, most police departments charge a fee for fingerprinting. If you pay for the fingerprints, then you are eligible to have this payment reimbursed. Please contact Pat Boyer at Area Code (612) 336-3272 for completion of the SF-1164 and reimbursement requirements.
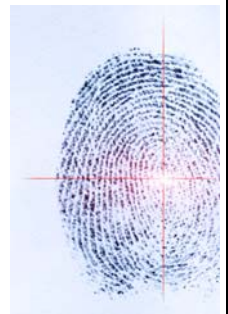
9) **Completion and timely submission of e-QIP exceeded.** Based on OMB requirements, e-QIP users are given 14 days to complete the e-QIP questionnaire and other required security forms. If not completed within the given timeframe, further delays occur. If additional time is necessary to complete the e-QIP forms, please contact the Personnel Security Section for assistance

10) **Completed the on-line e-QIP form, but neglected to release the e-QIP form.** This is an essential step in the process. If it is not done the Security Section cannot review, approve and further process your e-QIP security investigation. To release your e-QIP, select the **"*Display Your Data"*** link from the main menu. After a final review of your data select the **"*certify/submit button"*** to complete your form. On the last screen of e-QIP make sure to print a copy for your records, then print, sign and submit each of the signature forms along with your other supporting documents to the Personnel Security Section. For the SF-85 there are 2 signature forms, whereas the SF-85P and SF-86 require 3 signature forms.

    Only after you have printed and signed the appropriate signature pages, should you click on the final link entitled ***"Release Request/Transmit to Agency".***

11) **Completed and released the e-QIP form, but neglected to mail in the other form requirements.** If this is not done the Personnel Security Section cannot process your e-QIP investigation. Again, refer to top reason number one, that indicates to read your instructions thoroughly as well as providing the necessary additional documents.

12) **Forgot Golden Questions.** You cannot access e-QIP without your Golden Questions. If you forgot your golden questions, you will need to contact the Personnel Security Section to have them re-set. Please contact Thomas Lewis for all e-QIP SF-85 Golden Question re-sets or Tiana Richardson for all e-QIP SF-85P and SF-86 Golden Question re-sets.

13) **Entry of Golden Questions.** When accessing the e-QIP Applicant Site (http://www.opm.gov/e-qip/) after entering your social security number you are given three default Golden Questions consisting of: What is your last name? What is your place of birth? and What is your year of birth? e-QIP will then prompt you to create three new Golden Questions. If you do not enter your data as it was initially set up in e-QIP you will not be able to access e-QIP. It is important to review the e-QIP data that was given to you for accuracy. If there are discrepancies, you should not access e-QIP, but rather contact the Personnel Security Section for assistance. IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER AND SECURE THESE GOLDEN QUESTIONS FOR ACCESS TO E-QIP

14) After entering the data in each section of e-QIP application process, be sure to click the **"save and submit button"** to proceed to the next e-QIP screen.

15) **e-QIP System Requirements.** Your computer system must be configured to the following requirements to access e-QIP:
    a. If you are using Microsoft Internet Explorer (IE) you must have version 5.5 or later, with Service Pack 2 installed.
    b. The Internet options must be set to enable JavaScript, Cookies, TLS 1.0, and Scripting. Go to Tools, Options, and the" Advanced" tab to verify. e-QIP is also compatible with Netscape Navigator 6.1 and higher. Accessing e-QIP works best when using your work computer.

16) **Termination of e-QIP because of neglect to complete the on-line security form.** The e-QIP system will terminate your secure portal access if you do not enter your data within the allowable14 days or if you forget to release the e-QIP document to the Agency after completion. Please contact the Personnel Security Section if additional time is needed.

17) **Accessing e-QIP without permission.** Access to e-QIP is not granted unless the Personnel Security Section has given you access rights. Please contact Thomas Lewis for access to e-QIP SF-85s and Tiana Richardson for access to e-QIP SF-85Ps and SF-86s. Once you have been given permission to access OPM's secure e-QIP portal you will receive an email with further instructions. Supervisors are cc'd on all e-QIP notifications. In rare circumstances, should an applicant not have access to e-mail, the Personnel Security Section will mail the notification and instructions to the employee's home address.

18) **e-QIP Signature Date.** Based on both OPM and USDA requirements, the signature forms must be dated within seven days of completion. It is recommended that you do not date the signature forms until you are ready to mail them to the Personnel Security Section.

19) **OF-612 or Resume is acceptable**. If completing the OF-612 you do not need to complete the job announcement number or job applying for line. This form is required so OPM can validate your answers to those on your e-QIP questionnaire. A current Resume is also acceptable in lieu of the OF-612.

20) **Rejection of your e-QIP.** The Minneapolis Personnel Security Section, the Department Personnel Security Branch or OPM can reject an e-QIP application if there is incomplete information on the questionnaire or if the required forms were not submitted with your original e-QIP. Again, it is important to refer to top reason number one, which is **reading the instructions thoroughly in the email and e-QIP instructions. As well as providing the required forms.**

21) **e-QIP system glitches**. (i.e. rejecting an e-QIP that was reviewed, approved and released to the Department or OPM by the Personnel Security Staff) The Department and OPM typically will do their best to minimize system errors and catch them on their end before it causes an inconvenience to the employee. Although rare, other actions may occasionally be required of the e-QIP applicant and/or the Agency should system errors occur

STAFFING NEWS

MAKING OFFERS OF EMPLOYMENT

If you are a selecting official working in a headquarters duty location, defined as Riverdale or Washington, DC, and are filling a job in the field, please be aware that there are differences in how job offers are made between field and headquarters positions.
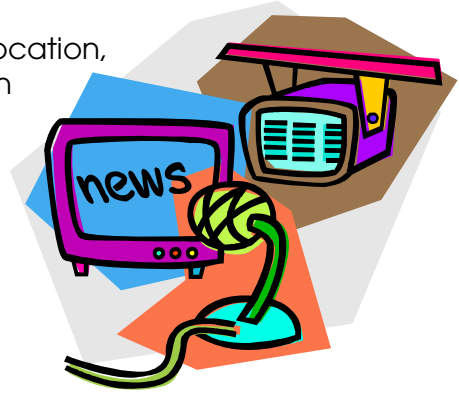
Job offers made for **field** positions:

Tentative job offers are typically offered by MRP hiring managers in field locations. Upon determining the best candidate for the job, the selecting official contacts the successful candidate to make a tentative job offer and answer questions the candidate may have – like payment of relocation costs.

Job offers extended by selecting officials must be tentative offers, because the Human Resources Division is required to review selection certificates to ensure that regulations governing hiring within the Federal government are followed and to review the OF-306 form completed by the selected. Once HR verifies that the selection can move forward, a confirmation of the job offer is made to the selected candidate via the selection letter.

Job offers made for **headquarters** positions:

Job offers for positions with an official duty station in headquarters, again defined as Riverdale or Washington, DC, are extended by Human Resources rather than the selecting official.

In these instances, hiring managers return selection certificates to Human Resources, where the certificates and OF-306 forms are reviewed. HR then extends an offer of employment to the individual and any questions posed by the candidate are referred to the hiring official. Confirmation of job offers are provided through the issuance of select letters.

If you are a hiring manager who is located in headquarters, but are filling a job located in the field, please be aware of the difference in how job offers are made and be prepared to discuss with the servicing staffing specialist the responsibility for making job offers.

USDA SUSPENDS USE OF OUTSTANDING SCHOLAR PROGRAM

The use of the Outstanding Scholar Program (OSP), a staffing alternative for appointing people to administrative positions at the GS-5 and GS-7 levels, has been suspended within the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This suspension comes on the heels of decisions made by the Merit Systems Protection Board, which found that the Outstanding Scholar Program could not be used to circumvent Veterans Preference.

The suspension of the use of the appointing authority is in line with decisions made by other departments within the Federal community. In the meantime, the USDA will work with mission area HR offices in pursuing efforts to make the OSP a legally viable option for use.