



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_2006.pdf) for easy access by all our customers. We hope you will find this helpful!!

Coming in the July Issue:

❖ **More about eOPF**

Be sure and check the calendar for the months of July, August, and September!!!

The Benefits Buzz



Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program (FEDVIP) is coming soon. This new benefit program will likely be offered during the fall open season, which begins November 13, 2006. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has selected seven companies to provide optional dental and vision insurance plans to the Federal family. Employees who elect to participate will be able to use pre-tax payroll deduction to pay the premiums. Watch for updates at: <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/benefits/fedvip.html>

Thrift Savings Plan News

TSP Forms have been updated to reflect the relocation of the TSP Service Office from New Orleans to several other locations. Please use the most current versions of the forms, available under Civilian Forms and Publications, at <http://www.tsp.gov>, and follow directions carefully, to ensure that your transactions are processed without delay

Quarterly TSP Participant Statements are posted on the TSP web site. You need your Social Security Number and your TSP Personal Identification Number (PIN) to review/print your statement. If you have forgotten your TSP PIN, you may request one at this web site, and it will be mailed to your address of record within 10 days. Please review your statement for accuracy and report any errors immediately. Go to: <http://www.tsp.gov> and Click on Account Access.

This Mistake Could Cost You! TSP contributions are capped by the IRS elective deferral limit of \$15,000 in 2006. If you are a FERS employee who plans to contribute \$15,000 to TSP this year, make sure you plan your contributions so that you contribute every pay period in the pay year, in order to receive the agency matching contributions each pay period. If you hit the IRS elective deferral limit before the end of the pay year (pay period 24), your TSP contributions stop, as well as your

government matching contributions. Don't let those matching contributions get away! For complete information, go to <http://www.tsp.gov/calc/contributions/index.html>

TSP Videos

Learn more about TSP! Watch short videos at your computer.

Go to: http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/benefits/benefits_videos.html

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TSP CatchUp contributions If you are an employee who is age 50 or older this year, you may contribute an additional \$5,000 to TSP, if your TSP regular contributions will reach the elective deferral limit of \$15,000 by pay period 24. Go to: <http://www.tsp.gov/forms/oc03-03.pdf>

Financial Planning Resources

Check out the many resources available to you! Go to:

http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/benefits/benefits_financial_planning.html

Retirement Seminars

We have compiled a list of vendors that provide retirement planning seminars.

Go to: <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/benefits/seminars.html>

Misleading Insurance Practices - Beware!

We hear occasionally about insurance or investment salespeople who contact Federal employees at work. They may claim to be "from your Benefits Department" or "a benefits contractor with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM)" or "authorized to speak with you on behalf of the USDA."

These are false claims, and these people are fishing (or phishing) for information from you. NEVER give out any personal information to the caller. NEVER invite any solicitors to meet you in your work place.

Commercial solicitation on Federal government property is prohibited by GSA regulations found at 41 CFR 102-74.410. Insurance salespeople do NOT have permission to be on government property or to solicit employees on the job.

Helpful Hints

Please remember that when submitting personnel/payroll documents it is very important that the documents contain the **legal** name as it appears in the NFC database and **not** nicknames.

The National Finance Center (NFC) has completed the reprogramming issues related to the annual pay adjustment for employees on retained pay. These adjustments were processed in pay period 10 and 11 and were retroactive to January 8, 2006.

THE STAFFING CORNER

Interested in hiring a Career Intern? Please read the following!!

Guidance provided to MRP by the Office of Personnel Management emphasized the requirement that appointments in the Career Intern Program (CIP) be accompanied by an explanation of how applications from all candidates for the position were handled. As a result, MRP must document how the regulatory requirements of 5 CFR Part 302, Employment in the Excepted Service, were followed. What this means to a hiring official:

- Applicants who are eligible for veterans' preference, and who meet qualifications and eligibility requirements, must be afforded veterans' preference in the hiring process, even though agencies are not required to announce positions for the CIP on the USAJobs website. Since announcements for positions to be filled by the CIP are not required to be posted, agencies have the flexibility to determine how applications are collected for the CIP. Applications may be collected via:
 - Job fairs

- Recruitment trips to college campuses, or
- Solicitation of applications from members of professional organizations

- Recruitment efforts must be documented in writing and all applications must be forwarded to the servicing Human Resources Office for evaluation. This evaluation consists of determining eligibility for appointment, basic qualifications, and ranking based on criteria established in the USDA CIP Plan.
- There is no minimum number of applications that must be considered in order to make an appointment under the CIP.
- Should a recruiting effort yield only one candidate, who is then found by HR to be qualified and is appointed, the recruiter or manager involved in the recruitment must document what occurred during the recruitment process to explain why the selectee was the only candidate.

Further questions can be directed to the servicing staffing specialist in your servicing HR office.

QUICKHIRE QUERIES

On June 1, 2006, Human Resources transitioned to the newest version of QuickHire on-line application software, QuickHire Xi. Consequently, we've renamed our column "QuickHire Queries." Like "PEARS Pointers" this column will provide tips and updates on applying for vacancies.

The transition to this new version of QuickHire includes enhancements of particular benefit to applicants:

- Applicants need only log-in to USAJOBS; no additional log-in is required.
- Applicants can store up to five resumes. Any one of the stored resumes may be submitted to a vacancy announcement. This enables applicants to develop and store resumes addressing knowledge, skills, and abilities for various occupations.
- Applicants can fax and store supporting documentation on-line (e.g., transcripts, DD-214). Unless there is a change in the supporting documentation or the documentation is illegible, there is no need to resubmit this information each time you apply, as has been required in the past. It

will be submitted automatically with your resume. Applicants must ensure that supporting documentation is legible. Original documents with light or faded print and/or dark or patterned backgrounds will not be legible when faxed. Illegible documentation can not be used for qualification or verification purposes.

Applicants can track the status of their application through USAJOBS

IMPORTANT: With the implementation of QuickHire Xi, all application materials, including supporting documentation, **must be received in the servicing Human Resources office by midnight Eastern time** on the closing date of the vacancy announcement. There is no longer a 48-hour post-announcement closure timeframe for submitting supporting documentation.

QuickHire Xi should simplify the application process, but be sure to read vacancy announcement instructions carefully to ensure you receive the full benefit of QuickHire Xi.



When do I submit fingerprint cards and how many? Although not mandatory, it is recommended fingerprint cards on new employees be submitted with all other new hire paperwork. With USDA's implementation of HSPD-12 we suggest you attach them to form AD-1197, "Request for USDA Identification (ID) Badge" along with the 2 required identity source documents. Two (2) sets of fingerprint cards are required on all background investigation submissions. Although rare, you may be instructed by the Personnel Security Staff to provide additional fingerprints cards. Typically this is as a result of unreadable or unidentifiable prints from the FBI.

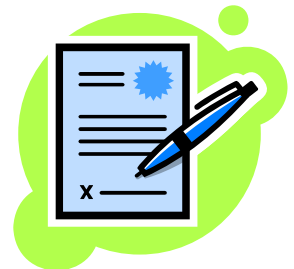


Who makes the decisions on required background investigations for contractors? HR Specialists in the Classification Section will provide guidance based on similar federal positions. However, Program Managers and Contracting Officer Representatives (CORs) have the ultimate responsibility for assuring the required background investigation and/or security clearance is accurately outlined in the agreement prior to awarding a contract. While MRP-BS, HR Personnel Security will process low-risk, non-sensitive and Public Trust positions for contractors, we do not facilitate those designated as National Security positions. This is done through a special agreement between USDA and DoD.

Note Department Bulletin # 04-02, National Security Clearances for USDA Contractor Employees, found at: <http://www.usda.gov/da/pdsd/bulletin04-02.pdf>

What” or “Who” Decides My Level of Background Investigation and What Does It All Mean Anyway?

Agencies are responsible for designating risk levels for every competitive service position within the agency. The *Human Resources Classification Section* of MRP-BS is in charge of making these determinations. Their decisions are based on the position's documented duties and responsibilities.



The *Personnel Security Section* is then responsible for facilitating the process by which employees obtain the required background investigation and/or security clearance.

Essentially there are 3 categories of designations. Each position is designated at a low, moderate, or high risk level, depending on the position's potential for adverse impact to the integrity and efficiency of the service (5 CFR 731.106).

- ❖ **Non-Sensitive, Low Risk Positions (LR):** Positions which involve duties and responsibilities of limited relation to an agency or program mission, so the potential for impact on the integrity and efficiency of the service is limited. Employees whose positions have this designation are required to complete the SF-85, Questionnaire for Non-Sensitive Positions.
- ❖ **Public Trust Positions:** Positions at the moderate or high risk levels are normally referred to as "Public Trust" positions. Such positions may involve policy making, major program responsibility, public safety and health, law enforcement duties, fiduciary responsibilities, or other duties demanding a significant degree of public trust; and positions involving access to or operation or control of financial records, with a significant risk for causing damage or realizing personal gain.

Employees whose positions have either a moderate or high risk designation are required to complete the SF-85P, Questionnaire for Public Trust Positions, on-line through OPM's e-QIP System.

- ❖ **Moderate Risk (MR)**: Positions with the potential for moderate to serious impact on the integrity and efficiency of the service. Duties involved are considerably important to the agency or program mission with significant program responsibility, or delivery of service.
- ❖ **High Risk (HR)**: Positions with the potential for exceptionally serious impact on the integrity and efficiency of the service. The duties involved are especially critical to the agency or program mission with a broad scope of responsibility and authority.
- ❖ **National Security Positions**: Positions whose activities, duties, and responsibilities involve the nation's war and defense plans, foreign policy, or access to classified information. Employees who occupy National Security positions are required to complete the SF-86, Questionnaire for National Security Positions, on-line through OPM's e-QIP System.

So, How Do I Find Out What Designation or Background Investigation is Required of My Position?

The position sensitivity determination is annotated in Block 4 of Section C on the second page of your position's PD Cover Sheet (AD-332). *(If you do not have a copy of your AD-332, contact your Supervisor or Program Administrative Support Office.)* The numbers in Block 4 correspond to the designated position sensitivity levels noted in the table below.

Certain forms are needed for initiating your investigation based on these sensitivity determinations.

For additional information and links to these forms, visit the Personnel Security web site found at: <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/hr.html>

Coming soon - eOPF

What is the eOPF Initiative?

eOPF is an e-GOV initiative, managed by the Office of Personnel Management, that provides an electronic version of hard copy OPF's and will be accessible to all employees via the internet.

What is the plan for USDA, MRP?

The USDA, Office of Human Capital Management (OHCM), has outlined a plan for all USDA agencies/mission areas to implement the eOPF Fast Track by July 2006. Fast Track implementation will capture day-forward data via an electronic interface with NFC and create an electronic OPF for all USDA employees. eOPF will be implemented in phases: 1) implement eOPF fast track within HR; 2) implement eOPF fast track throughout MRP; 3) implement backfile conversion (convert/scan hard copy OPF's into an electronic format.).



What is the Official Personnel Folder?

The Official Personnel Folder (Standard Form 66) is a file containing records that cover an individual's employment history. It covers Executive Branch service under Title 5, United States Code (<http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/get-cfr.cgi?TITLE=5&PART=293&SECTION=302&TYPE=TEXT>). The long-term records included in the file are chosen to protect the legal and financial rights of the Government and the employee. The Official Personnel Folder is part of the Government-wide system of records, OPM/GOVT-1. While a person is employed at a Federal agency, the agency becomes the custodian of the OPF. The OPF is ultimately the property of the Office of Personnel Management. The Guide to Personnel Recordkeeping, published by the OPM, contains the rules for creating, maintaining, using and disposing of the OPF.

What is the Electronic Official Personnel Folder (e-OPF)?

The e-OPF is an electronic version of the original OPF and a system for accessing the electronic folder online. The e-OPF allows each employee to have an electronic personnel folder instead of a paper file. Some of the features of the system include:

- Provides immediate access to OPF forms and information
- Delivers an e-mail notification to the employee when a document is added to the e-OPF
- Supports a multi-level secure environment, with security rules for vital information
- Eliminates loss of an employee's official personnel files during filing and routing
- Reduces cost associated with storage, maintenance, and retrieval of records
- Provides for electronic transfer of human resources data
- Integrates and compliments agency human resource information system capabilities
- Complies with OPM and federally mandated HR employee record management regulations

How will e-OPF be implemented?

e-OPFs will be implemented in two successive phases: (1) "Fast Track" when, beginning on a specific date and going forward, all employee data will be recorded, stored, and transferred electronically; and (2) "Back-File Conversion" when OPFs that already exist on paper will be digitized.