HR Broadcast

October 2008 Issue

Coming in the January Issue:

More LincPass FAQ

Savings Bonds via Treasury Direct

In this issue:

The MRPBS web site has been redesigned! You may have noticed our new look. Be sure to check out the Human Resources pages, and save it as a favorite!

MRPBS Web Site

HR Calendar

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

HR Calendar

Be sure and check the calendar for the months of October, November, and December!!!

The Benefits Buzz

BENEFITS OPEN SEASON WILL BE NOVEMBER 10 - DECEMBER 10, 2008

Open season is your annual opportunity to review and change your enrollment in the Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) program, the Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Programs (FEDVIP), and to enroll in the Federal Flexible Spending Accounts (FSAFEDS) for health care and/or dependent care for 2009.

Watch for all employee emails, and check our **web site** for specific information when the time comes.

Questions? Please call or email the **Benefits Specialist** who services your program/location.

THINKING ABOUT RETIREMENT AT THE END OF THIS YEAR??

The end of the year is the most popular time to retire. Keep your retirement plans on track by following our **Checklist**.

Questions? Please call or email the **Benefits Specialist** who services your program/location.

THRIFT SAVINGS PLAN

IMPORTANT THRIFT SAVINGS PLAN NEWS

Don't make a TSP mistake that would cost you money!

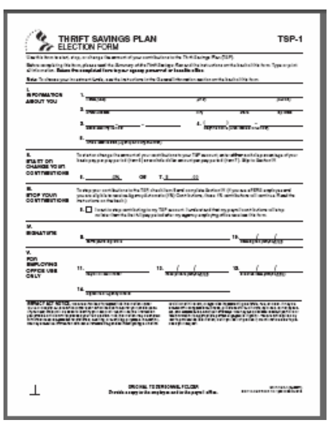
If you are an employee covered by the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS), check the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) contributions on the Year to Date column of your Statement of Earnings and Leave. Are you in danger of hitting the maximum annual contribution limit of $15,500 before pay period 25? If you hit that limit too early in the year, your TSP contributions will stop and you will lose your agency matching contributions for any pay period that you don't contribute to TSP. Take a few minutes to evaluate, calculate, and if necessary, revise your contributions for the remainder of the year. The pay year ends with pay period 25 this year (pay period ending December 20, official pay date will be December 31, 2008). You may review your Statement of Earnings and Leave, and make your TSP contribution changes, on the **National Finance Center's Employee Personal Page**, or you may fax a **TSP-1** form to HR-Benefits at 612-336-3545.

Employees covered by the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) do not receive agency matching contributions to the TSP.

TSP WEB SITE

The **TSP web site** is your official source for Thrift Savings Plan information, publications and all TSP forms. Be sure to use Civilian forms and publications, as the uniformed services information applies only to military members.

EFFECTIVE DATE OF TSP CONTRIBUTION TRANSACTIONS


THRIFT SAVINGS PLAN
ELECTION FORM
TSP-1

Please note that **TSP-1** and **TSP-1-C** forms faxed to HR-Benefits are effective at the beginning of the following pay period. Transactions processed through the NFC Employee Personal Page may be effective in the pay period it is processed. Please take this into consideration when you are doing the math!

CATCHING UP TSP

Employees covered by CSRS or FERS who are age 50 or older by December 31, 2008, may contribute an extra $5,000 to the TSP, only if their regular contributions will reach the $15,500 limit in 2008. Catch up contributions are made using the **NFC Employee Personal Page**, or by faxing a **TSP-1-C** form to HR-Benefits at 612-336-3545. Catch up contributions automatically stop when the $5,000 limit is reached, and catch up elections do not carry over from year to year.

Leave and Compensation

USDA WEBTA IMPLEMTATION

The new time and attendance system, webTA, is scheduled to be implemented effective October 21, 2008. Timekeepers will use webTA to enter the time and attendance for all employees beginning with pay period 21. Supervisors will approve the time and attendance electronically within webTA.

All timekeepers and supervisors who are responsible for submitting and approving the time and attendance are required to take the training offered on the webTA website. The training is a web-based tutorial with specific instructions and screen shots from the webTA system. There are also guides available for each role (i.e. timekeeper, supervisor, etc.) on the website for your reference.

Please visit the **[Department's webTA website]**

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING WEBTA

What is webTA?

WebTA is the web-based time and attendance program that the Department of Agriculture purchased to replace the current time & attendance software program, STARweb. WebTA was developed to interface with our payroll/personnel service provider, the National Finance Center (NFC).

How does webTA work?

WebTA allows employees and/or timekeepers to enter their own time and leave data and provides them with the ability to submit electronic leave requests online. Supervisors/Managers certify the T&A's and may approve leave requests online. The approved records are then transmitted to the NFC for salary processing.

Are the User ID and password case sensitive?

Yes, all user IDs and passwords are case sensitive. The passwords must also adhere to Departmental eAuthenticaton password policy.

I have logged into webTA and noticed that there are multiple buttons at the bottom of the screen. What do they represent?

The buttons represent different roles within webTA. Roles include: employee, timekeeper, supervisor, HR Administrator, and Administrator. Access is based on your job function. If you have more than one role within webTA, you can move between these roles by clicking on the buttons at the bottom of the webTA screens. The button reflecting the role you are currently using will be grayed out.

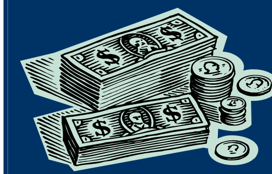
Can I take a phone call or a short break while logged into webTA?

WebTA has a security setting that will time the user out after approximately ten minutes of non-use.

Can previous certified time & attendance records be viewed and printed?

WebTA maintains a history of all records previously certified and submitted through webTA. These records are available to the employee, timekeeper and/or supervisor as long as the employee is an active employee. To view a previously certified record, click on the button labeled "Certified T&A's" for the

YOUR EARNINGS AND LEAVE STATEMENTS



As part of the ongoing Personal Identification Information (PII) initiative, effective pay period 19, the NFC will fully mask Social Security Numbers (SSN) on Earnings and Leave (E&L) statements that are printed and mailed by NFC. The SSN will not be shown at all on the statement. Please note, employees who print their E&L statement from the Employee Personal Page, the full SSN will continue to appear on the E&L.

selected employee, select the pay period you wish to print by clicking on the radio button to the left of the pay period, scroll down to the bottom of the screen and click on "View Certified Record." If you wish to print the record, right click your mouse while in the view-only pop-up box, and select the print command. If the browser you are using doesn't have a print option when you right click your mouse, you can print by depressing the Control key at the same time you depress the letter P key (CTRL-P). Any previously certified record printed this way will have "Validated" listed as the status, even though it is actually the certified record. In order to have the record status listed as "Certified the record must be printed (via the Summary screen) after it is certified by the supervisor but before it is sent to the NFC.

What if my timekeeper or my supervisor is out of the office when timesheets are due? Will I still be paid?

WebTA is designed to allow every timekeeper and supervisor one or more delegates. When an individual is listed as a delegate by a timekeeper or supervisor, he/she has all the necessary access under his/her own User ID/password to perform the functions of the person who delegated duties to them.

How many delegates should a timekeeper or supervisor have?

At least one delegate should be named at all times, but there is no limit to how many can be named. Keep in mind, however, that delegates will receive all system-generated emails for the group of employees involved.

Can a record be changed after it is certified?

Once a record is certified, neither the employee nor the timekeeper can edit the record without the involvement of the supervisor. If changes are required to a certified record that has not yet been sent to the NFC, the supervisor can de-certify the record, and then the employee or timekeeper can make changes. Once the changes are entered, the record will need to be revalidated by the employee or timekeeper and recertified by the supervisor. If revisions are needed to a certified record that has already been submitted to NFC, a corrected record will need to be created and validated by the timekeeper, and certified by the supervisor.

Can a supervisor create or edit an employee's time & attendance record?

No, a supervisor does not have the required access to edit the time & attendance records directly. Supervisors requesting changes will need to direct the employee or timekeeper, depending on which role enters the data, to make the required changes.

Can a time & attendance record be deleted?

No, a regular time & attendance record cannot be deleted. However, edits can be made to the current record any time prior to the certified record being sent to the NFC for processing. If the record has been certified but not yet sent to the NFC, the supervisor must de-certify the record before changes can be entered. Uncertified corrections can be deleted by the timekeeper.

How does webTA know how many hours of annual leave to accrue each pay period?

The Service Computation Date (SCD) is maintained in the T&A Profile screen for each employee so that the system can calculate the appropriate annual leave accruals each pay period. Additionally, webTA will change the annual leave accrual rate from four hours/pay period to six hours/pay period and from six hours/pay period to eight hours/pay period in the first full pay period following the employee's third and fifteenth anniversary, respectively.

<u>NOTE TO TIMEKEEPERS</u>: The annual leave accrual rate does not change unless the SCD is entered and the T&A Profile is saved.

ANTICIPATED PHASE II MOBILE ENROLLMENT DEPLOYMENT

Starting October 13, 2008 the second phase of the mobile enrollment deployment of enrollment stations for LincPass Credentialing will begin. It is anticipated that the 34 proposed circuits, which encompass 221 communities will run through the first week of April 2009. More information will be posted on the **USAccess web site** as it becomes available.

USDA Centralized LincPass Mobile Enrollment Card Distribution Update:

Employees in larger cities (Washington, St. Louis, Kansas City, Minneapolis, etc.) have a "permanent" enrollment/activation station close to their office; in these locations employees can conveniently receive and activate their cards at one of the stations. In rural America and smaller communities, however, we have utilized a "mobile enrollment" concept making it impossible for an employee to return to an enrollment station for card activation.

Accordingly, the Department has worked with GSA to develop a centralized distribution and activation process for our employees NOT located close to permanent stations. **This process will begin in mid-October** and can be "customized" according to your agency's needs. What this means to MRP field employees is that a process is being put into place by which your card will be distributed to you through your Regional Office or designated primary point of contact (POC). More information will be provided as it becomes available.

LINCPASS CREDENTIAL - EMPLOYEE APPLICANT PROCESS

As a USDA Employee Applicant, you will go through the following steps in order to get your LincPass.

Step 1: Get Sponsored - The first step is getting sponsored for your LincPass. This means that your Sponsor (the staff in the MRPBS HRD Personnel Security Section) substantiates your need for a LincPass. A staff member from the Personnel Security Section will prepare your sponsorship record for submission to USAccess by leveraging information from the HR systems. Once submitted, you will receive an email notification to go enroll for your LincPass at an enrollment station. Additionally, if you do not have a NACI or higher background investigation on file, the HR Personnel Security Section will initiate one and contact you with further instructions for completing the process.

Step 2: Enroll - Enrollment is the process by which you are identity proofed at an Enrollment Station and where biometric information is captured for placement onto your LincPass. After scheduling an appointment to enroll, you will appear in person at the Enrollment Station. The Registrar will verify your ID documents to make sure they match your sponsorship record, then the Registrar will take your picture, as well as fingerprints, which will later be placed onto the LincPass credential.

You will receive an email notification informing you that you have been sponsored. If your work location is serviced by a mobile enrollment station, the email will first ask you to visit the **Enrollment Station locator website** to find the closest station to you. Next, verify your information in the email is correct. If not, you need to contact the Personnel Security Section to have your information updated. Then schedule an appointment at an Enrollment Station using the GSA Online Scheduling Tool. Finally, appear for your scheduled appointment and bring two forms of ID. The Registrar will then have you verify your information in USAccess, verify your IDs and scan them, take your photo and obtain electronic fingerprint images.

Step 3: Activation - Activation is the process by which you pick up your LincPass credential and activate it for use. You must activate your LincPass in person at an Activation Station or at a self-service Activation

Station. You will set a new PIN number and then several digital certificates will be downloaded to your LincPass. You will then read and digitally sign the privacy and cardholder responsibilities statement. Your LincPass is now activated and ready to use.

Please note that if you enrolled at a mobile station, you will most likely receive your LincPass credential sometime this fall. "Lite" or "Self" activation stations will be developed and deployed to Program service areas. This is being facilitated by your Agency's Physical Security Officers. Once these stations are deployed in an area near you, you will receive instructions on activating your LincPass credential. Your Agency POCs for mobile station enrollments and card distribution are: APHIS, Ken Miller; AMS, John Starr; and GIPSA, Monica Alexander.

LincPass FAQ's

How long will the old IDs work?

As long as we need to issue all employees the new badge. Those employees with special language on the back of their APHIS ID cards will need to keep them permanently since the LincPass allows for no custom language.

If only 90 % of employees will have the new pass, why are we doing this?

Because the President mandated it and it is a secure badge with dynamic function that protects our PII.

Why aren't 100% of employees going to have the new pass?

Some of our employees and contractors work less that 6 months and do not need unescorted physical or logical (computer access).

If APHIS employees have an office in a nonfederal building, perhaps at an airport, is access to their office going to be controlled by LincPass?

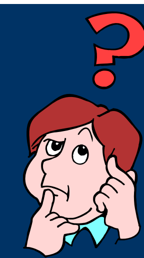
No. An airport badge or other agency badge may be needed. If you have a USDA.Gov email address you will need a LincPass to operate your computer.

If APHIS employees have an office in another federal building, perhaps at a US Fish and Wildlife Service National Wildlife Refuge, is access to their offices and warehouses going to be controlled by LincPass?

Yes. Department of Interior and approximately 68 other agencies have all signed on to the LincPass, or what is called by GSA, the USA Access Card.

How is access going to be controlled if a building has an existing security system (i.e. ADT Security)? Will the LincPass system replace the existing system?

No. The LincPass is a card, not a system. If the building is owned or leased by USDA the system will be replaced with what is called EPacs which is capable of reading the card.



WILL WE STILL NEED TO CONTACT SECURITY TO ACTIVATE FIELD EMPLOYEE BADGES WHEN THEY COME TO HQ?

Yes.

HOW LONG WILL THE TRANSITION TAKE?

APHIS has several personnel who are working to deploy the program. APHIS leads USDA and the federal government overall in implementation. It will be a few years before all APHIS employees have received their new LincPass.

All APHIS employees' badges have a red notation of, "Federal Emergency Response Official." What does that mean?

APHIS is a vanguard agency in the Protection of American agriculture from natural to terrorist incidents that could affect the nation's and world's food supply. As such, APHIS personnel are provided a badge that will allow jobs being done in times of a disaster or outbreak. The response official designation will allow APHIS personnel to come to work and travel when and where the general public may not be allowed to do so. It also will allow those select APHIS employees to enter a "Federal Incident Command

Center" to participate in emergencies. All APHIS personnel, regardless of occupational specialty are important to APHIS and its emergency mission.

The designation supports the position that APHIS is an emergency response organization, much as all APHIS job announcements say that 'all agency employees may be asked or assigned to participate in rotating temporary duty assignments to support emergency programs at some time during their careers with APHIS'. Any APHIS employee could be called to respond, and this badging would support their role; conversely, no employee should assume that they are being deployed immediately simply because their badge designates them as a Federal Emergency Response official.

Will any PII be on the pass/chip?

No and yes. Technically the biometrics (fingerprints and picture) can be PII, but they are encrypted digital representations that cannot be compromised unless you unlock the chip. That requires your pin number and a special program.

How will PII be protected on the database?

The access control system will not have any information other than your name, location, office phone number, the 200 bit numeric string and your picture and program. The HSPD-12 system and the card management system GSA has do have PII and have been rated as sensitive systems and have the appropriate certification by USDA to protect our data.

Do I get a new picture?

Absolutely, as many as you want until we get it right. Unfortunately per HSPD-12, you are not allowed to smile for your official ID picture.

The LincPass presentation advised that if you had a BI 20 years ago, you do not need to have another one. Was that an example or is that the cutoff? i.e. if the BI is older than 20 years, does the employee have to get another one?

Each Agency and/or Program may have their own requirements. MRP currently stands by the rule that as long as you haven't had a break in service of 24 months or more, your background investigation is good. The exception to this is if your position maintains a Confidential, Secret, or Top Secret Clearance, then there are reinvestigation requirements for each. (i.e., 15 yrs for Confidential; 10 years for Non-Sensitive Secret Clearances; and 5 years for Critical or Special Sensitive Clearances (Secret & Top Secret).

How long does the BI take?

It depends. Much is dependent upon the individual's employment and residence history. If you moved around quite a bit, it will take longer to check references, etc.