FSIS NOTICE	19-08	3/26/08

ASSURANCENET DATA MONITORING RESPONSIBILITIES AND INSTRUCTIONS FOR OFFICE OF FIELD OPERATIONS MANAGERS

I.   PURPOSE

This notice provides specific instructions to Office of Field Operations (OFO) managers at Agency headquarters (HQ) and at the District Offices (DO) on reviewing, monitoring, analyzing, and responding to AssuranceNet results. AssuranceNet has been operative since June 2006 and will be revised (Version 3.0) in May 2008, at which time this notice will be updated. This notice outlines OFO manager requirements for documenting findings as well as any required follow-up. Finally, this notice clarifies that AssuranceNet reports and analyses are appropriate for viewing organizational performance at the district and circuit level rather than at the level of individual establishments, which are monitored through supervisory oversight and by using other tools such as the Performance-Based Inspection System (PBIS).

NOTE: The instructions in this notice do not apply to in-plant inspection program personnel.

II. BACKGROUND

AssuranceNet is a web-based system that OFO uses to monitor organizational performance at the circuit, district, and national levels for mission critical and key administrative functions and activities. Each level of management is responsible for a specific scope and depth of analysis of AssuranceNet data. OFO Managers must conduct systematic analyses in their areas of responsibility using the AssuranceNet results to identify where organizational performance is not meeting established performance measures, or where performance indicates a vulnerability to failure in achieving agency objectives and mandates.

AssuranceNet data are broken down to the establishment level for certain activities. The data, however, are generally not used for establishment level measures. Nevertheless, establishment level data have some value in assessing circuit performance. Specifically, when a circuit is not meeting a performance measure or is barely meeting a performance target, establishment level data should be reviewed to

DISTRIBUTION: Electronic	**NOTICE EXPIRES:** 4/1/09	**OPI:** OPPD

determine whether there are outliers that would warrant further investigation.

III.   REVIEWING DATA TO EVALUATE ACTION LEVELS

A. Action levels are listed on the AssuranceNet Action Level Matrix attached to this Notice. Use the action level as a guide for determining whether performance at the circuit, district, or national level warrants investigation or follow-up action. In some cases, the action level is the same as the target level shown in Column 3 of the matrix, which is the Agency's objective. For example, there are some performance measures for which objective, measurable data are available. These measures take into account the normal variations that can be expected in performance. For these objectively determined performance measures, the action level is the same as the target level.

B. There are other performance measures for which objective, measurable data are not available. For these, OFO must rely on more subjective assessments made by supervisors using the In-Plant Performance System (IPPS). Most target levels for these measures are set at 100%. While the supervisor is expected to follow up on individual performance in every case and ensure that there is appropriate management of individual employee performance, the District is expected to investigate further when a circuit or the District falls below 90% (action level) on these IPPS-driven measures. In addition, the District Analyst or designee is to monitor the performance of each circuit on these IPPS-driven measures over time (i.e. compare performance each quarter with previous quarters) to note any trends that may be developing, such as performance for the circuit trending downwards or showing little or no improvement.

C. The expectation is that if circuit or District performance is below the action level, the District Manager or designee will look into the reasons the measure was not met and will document his/her findings and follow up as outlined below. It should be noted that not every instance in which a performance measure falls below the action level should be construed as a failure to meet mission objectives. The point of establishing an action level and requiring further inquiry and follow up is to ensure that attention is being paid to critical areas of organizational performance, and that vulnerabilities and potential failures are addressed before they become actual failures.

IV.   ANALYSIS - MONITORING PROCEDURES AND FREQUENCIES

A. Frontline Supervisors (FLS) and District management teams are to review AssuranceNet results for their respective areas on a monthly basis. At Headquarters, the Executive Associates for Regulatory Operations (EAROs) are to review the performance of their assigned Districts on a quarterly basis. It should be noted that, depending on the performance measure involved and the activity the measure represents, the data reviewed in a given month or quarter may actually reflect a larger window of time than one month or one quarter. For example, recall management measures have to be viewed for the entire year as recalls do not occur in every district every month, if at all, during a given year. For performance measures that draw data from IPPS assessments, the organizational performance data makes little sense if viewed for less than a 90-day window, because IPPS visits are not performed at the same rate and do not cover the full complement of elements/measures evenly within a given month.

B. The tools that are available for reviewing AssuranceNet results are the Standard Reports, Custom Reports, and the AssuranceNet Dashboard Manager. The Standard Reports are available to Frontline Supervisors, District Managers and Deputies, District Analysts, and Headquarters users. The Custom Reports and Dashboard Manager are not available to the Frontline Supervisors because the Dashboard captures data at the District and National levels only. The Dashboard is a speedometer-type display that tracks performance in green, yellow, and red zones. A yellow reading shows that performance is just below meeting the standard. A trending chart is also available, in which a yellow downward trending arrow indicates a downward trend from the green zone where the performance measure is being met and signals the need for an inquiry regarding the trend before the red zone is reached. The Dashboard Manager allows viewing of each measure individually on a month-to-month basis. The Dashboard cursor can be moved along a continuum so that the user can view the change in performance from one month to the next.

C. The following outlines the minimum expectation at each level and the reports that should be utilized, at a minimum. There are other tools and options available for reviewing and exploring data further that should also be used, as appropriate, to "drill down" into areas for which action may be warranted or to further explore the results and determine where the vulnerabilities may be:

1. Headquarters Level

a. The Office of Field Operations (OFO) Assistant Administrator/Deputy Assistant Administrator (AA/DAA) is to conduct a review of District performance on all measures using a specially designed report reflecting the past four quarters of data on each measure, for each District. This review will be done at least twice a year. This report is also available to the EAROs to review at least twice per year to look for trends in performance in their assigned Districts.

b. At a minimum, the EAROs are to conduct a quarterly review of the performance measure data for the previous quarter for their assigned Districts. At a minimum, they are to review the following set of reports covering the applicable quarter for each assigned District. The custom reports listed below can be found in the AssuranceNet Custom Reports Public Folders under AssuranceNet/Master Custom Reports.

- AssuranceNet custom reports showing circuit and district performance for all measures under each of the Functions 1, 2, 6, and 7 for the past quarter. (The Functions are delineated in the Matrix attached to this Notice.)
- AssuranceNet standard reports showing district performance under Functions 3 and 5 for the past quarter.
- AssuranceNet standard report showing district performance for Function 4 for the past year.
- AssuranceNet custom report showing circuit/district performance on Function 8 measures, year to date beginning with the first day of the current performance rating cycle.
- AssuranceNet standard report showing district performance on Function 16 for

the past quarter.
- View the DA HACCP and Administrative DA screens for applicable Districts, to review the findings and comments entered for the three months falling within the quarter under review.
- View the Administrative (RMA) measures using standard reports every quarter.

2. District Level

a. The DM is responsible for ensuring that District and circuit performance data is assessed, acted on, and appropriately documented. At a minimum, the DM ensures that the District Analyst (DA) or designee conducts a monthly review of District and circuit performance with respect to all performance measures for the previous month (unless otherwise noted) as follows. The custom reports listed below are available in the AssuranceNet Custom Reports Public Folders under AssuranceNet/Master Custom Reports in the subfolder with the District's name,
for example, AssuranceNet/Master Custom Reports/Atlanta:

- AssuranceNet custom report showing circuit and district performance for all measures under Functions 1, 2, 6, and 7 for the month as well as the past quarter.
- AssuranceNet standard report showing district performance under Functions 3 and 5 for the month as well as the past quarter.
- AssuranceNet standard report showing district performance for Function 4 for the past year.
- AssuranceNet standard report showing district performance on Function 8 measures, year to date beginning with the first day of the current performance rating cycle, and drilling down to the circuit level, whether or not the District is meeting the performance measure, to locate circuits that are not making progress

b. The DA is to view the Administrative (RMA) screen every month to determine performance levels.

c. The DA is to look to the establishment level, where applicable, for circuits that are slightly above or below the action level to determine whether further inquiry or follow up is warranted.

d. The DA is to use AssuranceNet standard and custom reports to export data to Excel to review data for trends over time. For example, the DA may compare data quarter-by-quarter or month-by-month over a period of a year.

3. **Circuit Level**

1. The Frontline Supervisor (FLS) is to review AssuranceNet Standard Reports for the circuit on a monthly basis. The Functions on which the FLS is to focus are Functions 1, 2, 6, and 7. The FLS is to view establishment level data for Functions 1 and 2, where available, to determine whether there are results that are out of the range of the performance levels at most other establishments in the circuit. In addition, he or she is to review and observe subordinate supervisors' IPPS as required and is to make comments in AssuranceNet on the IPPS report itself. The FLS is to use the Standard Reporting for Function 8 for the year to date beginning with the first day of the current performance rating cycle to determine how he or she is doing with respect to the

performance measures for review and observation of IPPS.

V. RESPONDING AND DOCUMENTING -REPORTING AND FOLLOW-UP

A. Documentation is required at each level to establish that applicable data have been reviewed and analyzed, and that follow-up has been initiated as appropriate. Each review level is to determine whether there has been a failure to exceed the action levels listed on the AssuranceNet Action Level Matrix. Use the action level as a guide for determining whether performance is trending downward or failing, thus indicating that attention needs to be given to the functions and activities that the performance measures address.

B. Headquarters Level

1. The AA or DAA will discuss with the EAROs any concerns that emerge from review of District performance as reflected in the AssuranceNet data, and the EARO is to document any follow-up as outlined below.

2. At a minimum, the EAROs are to document the results of their quarterly review in a Word document that summarizes their specific conclusions, Function by Function, and documents discussion of the findings and follow-up with the respective Districts to explain or address the findings.

NOTE: AssuranceNet version 3.0 will accommodate this documentation directly in the system.

C. District Level

The DM is responsible for ensuring that the data assessment is performed, accurate, and appropriately documented. The DM ensures that the DA extracts, reviews, and analyzes the AssuranceNet and other relevant data and highlighting measures on which the District has failed to exceed the action levels, presenting the analysis to the District Manager and his or her team for discussion. The DM will brief the EARO for their District when they have concerns about the Districts failure to exceed the action levels. The District is expected to keep a record of its monthly review/analysis and to document the follow-up actions taken. At a minimum, the DA is to complete the Administrative (DA) screen in AssuranceNet each month to reflect the outcome of this monthly analysis and follow-up action in detail. The AssuranceNet User's Guide, located in the help menu, has specific instructions on completing this screen.

D. Circuit Level

The FLS is to document any follow-up that he or she conducts in response to AssuranceNet results for a given month and to provide his or her findings in a Word document that he or she e-mails to the District Analyst. The District Analysis is to factor in this e-mail into the District's analysis and reaction to AssuranceNet data.

Refer AssuranceNet application questions to AssuranceNet.Help@fsis.usda.gov.

Refer technical questions to the Policy Development Division at 1-800-233-3935 or submit your question through askFSIS.

Assistant Administrator
Office of Policy and Program Development