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EXECUTIVE AFFAIRS & CORRESPONDENCE

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SUMMARY OF REVISIONS: The NWS Correspondence Manual (Sections 3-10 of the previous issuance of this Directive) has been removed from the body of the updated Directive and added as Appendix A of this Directive. The main body of the Directive now consists of the responsibilities of Executive Affairs and the Action Office in preparing executive correspondence.

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December 5, 2008
Date

EXECUTIVE AFFAIRS & EXECUTIVE CORRESPONDENCE

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1. **Introduction.** This directive governs the roles of the Executive Affairs Office (EA) and the Action Office in the preparation of National Weather Service (NWS) correspondence for signature by NWS senior management and for correspondence for signature at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and Department of Commerce (DOC) levels.

2. **Roles of Executive Affairs/Action Offices**

2.1 **EA Responsibilities.** NWS EA is the focal point for all tracked actions assigned by or prepared for signature by the Assistant Administrator (AA) and the Deputy Assistant Administrator (DAA), and has the following responsibilities.

- a. EA reviews incoming correspondence and directs it to the appropriate office for action or information purposes. EA assigns the action, determines the due date, and prepares an NWS Executive Item Sheet.

Note: The Due Date EA is the date by which the Action Office must provide a signature-ready response to EA.

- b. EA assigns actions via e-mail notification, with electronic copy distribution via internet (Executive Log).
- c. EA monitors due dates, reminds Action Offices at a minimum the day before the Due Date to EA, and follows up on overdue actions.
- d. EA reviews all correspondence prepared for signature by the AA and DAA to ensure compliance with all NWS/NOAA/DOC correspondence procedures.
- e. EA documents and reports quality assurance findings to the Action Office.
- f. EA electronically transmits to NOAA all NOAA/DOC controlled correspondence. EA retains the official file until receiving a copy of the signed and dated response from NOAA. The file is then returned to the Action Office.
- g. EA closes a correspondence action upon receipt of the appropriate documentation from the Action Office as described in Section 2.2.1.c.
- h. EA maintains NWS format standards.

2.2 **Action Office Responsibilities.** The NWS Action Office is that NWS element which has primary responsibility for the subject matter of the correspondence. The Action Office should prepare a reply and assemble the correspondence package for the AA or DAA's signature. The responsibilities of the Action Offices are set forth below.

2.2.1 Timeliness. In order to meet due dates to EA, NWS, NOAA, DOC, or external organizations, Action Offices must adhere to the following procedures, and must ensure timely responses to all correspondence.

- a. The Action Office Director is responsible for meeting all due dates. Extensions may be granted by EA only if the Action Office shows justification. Requests for extensions of due dates must be in writing, addressed to the EA staff.
- b. It is the responsibility of the Action Office to notify EA immediately if an action is assigned error.
- c. If the incoming correspondence does not require a written response signed by the AA or DAA, it is the responsibility of the Action Office to advise EA what alternative action will be taken. A correspondence action cannot be closed except through a response or statement submitted to EA. The following are examples of acceptable documentation required to close actions:
 - (1) A response may be signed at the Office Director or program officer level; a copy of the signed and dated response must be received by EA by COB on the due date. The action number and a request to close the action based on the document must be included.
 - (2) An e-mail may be sent by a representative of the Action Office, after proper clearances and coordination, to the author of the incoming correspondence; a forwarded copy of the e-mail, including action number and a request to close the action based on the e-mail, must be received by EA by COB on the due date.
 - (3) If a phone call to the correspondent was made by a representative of the Action Office, and no further action is required, the Action Office must e-mail EA a record of the phone call. Include the date and names of the persons involved in the phone call along with the action number and a request to close the item based on the action taken.
 - (4) If no response or action is required, advise EA of the decision via e-mail by the due date, including the action number and a request to close the action.

If the document to be signed by the AA or DAA is internally generated, any internal or external deadline known by the drafter must be indicated on the Correspondence Control Sheet.

As a general rule, EA has two working days to clear a correspondence action and forward it to the front office. In addition, the AA requires two working days on actions sent for signature. These timeframes are subject to change if the action is a high priority (due within five working days).

2.2.2 A Priorities. An "**A Priority**" action is DOC/NOAA-controlled with a one-day turn around. When preparing an "A Priority" action, there are few, if any, higher priorities. Until the response is signed by the AA or DAA, an office manager and focal point from the Action Office must be available. The action office must make certain that an "A Priority" action has proper clearances from General Counsel for Weather and/or Legislative Affairs prior to submitting to EA.

Should a bureau/line office response not meet the five-day deadline for returning correspondence to the DOC Executive Secretariat, then a memorandum of lateness is required. The memorandum should be addressed to the Secretary and Deputy Secretary, signed at the line office director level or higher (normally the first Executive Service level official in the chain of command), and initialed by the approving authority in the bureau or office. Proposed responses are not accepted without the Statement of Lateness if the deadline has not been met.

2.2.3 Taskers. Taskers are tasks or actions assigned by the NOAA Program Coordination Office, often with a short turn around. Taskers are forwarded to NWS via e-mail and can be responded to via e-mail; however, normal NWS coordination, discussed below, applies.

2.2.4 Coordination/Clearance. It is the responsibility of the Action Office to determine and obtain clearance from all necessary organizational elements. For actions submitted for AA/DAA signature, this must be completed prior to submission to EA.

It is recommended the Action Office give the following instructions to those providing signature clearance:

A) CLEARED

- 1) Clear the document with "no comments."
- 2) Clear the document and recommend changes.
- 3) Clear the document with required changes.

B) NON-CONCURRENCE

- 1) Withhold clearance, but must include SUBSTANCE comments. Specificity in recommended changes and/or wording is strongly encouraged.

All responses to congressional and Cabinet-level correspondence will be coordinated and/or cleared as follows.

a. **General Counsel for Weather (GCW).** All responses prepared for signature at the Department level (Secretary and Deputy Secretary) or at the NOAA level (Under Secretary and Deputy Under Secretary), must be coordinated with GCW. GCW clearance and/or comments must be part of the correspondence package submitted to EA.

Correspondence assigned to the NWS Line Office for response, where the incoming is addressed to DOC/NOAA officials, must be coordinated with GCW if determined by the Action Office to have issues of substance.

c. **Legislative Affairs for Weather (LAW).** All responses to Members of Congress or Members of the President's Cabinet must be coordinated with LAW. LAW clearance and/or comments must be part of the correspondence package submitted to EA.

d. **Regional Offices.** All responses to Members of Congress must be coordinated with the appropriate Region. If the issue involves setting national policy, the NWS Director must coordinate/clear on the response; otherwise, coordination may be below the Director level.

NOTE: All congressional correspondence received directly by Regional Offices should be forwarded by email to EA for assignment and tracking.

In addition to the above coordination guidelines for congressional responses, several other specific issues require additional coordination.

e. **Correspondence for Signature at DOC/NOAA.** All correspondence to be forwarded to NOAA or DOC for signature must be coordinated with GCW. GCW clearance and/or comments must be part of the correspondence package submitted to EA.

f. **Programs Affecting Several Offices or Regions.** All responses to correspondence regarding issues that affect more than one program office or region must be coordinated/cleared with those other offices (e.g., NOAA Weather Radio, missed warnings, office closures).

g. **Financial or Budget Issues.** All responses regarding financial or budget issues must be coordinated and cleared with the Office of the Chief Financial Officer/Chief Administrative Officer (OCFO).

h. **Personnel Issues.** All responses regarding personnel issues must be coordinated and cleared with OCFO.

i. **NWSEO Issues.** All responses regarding NOAA’s National Weather Service Employees Organization must be coordinated and cleared with the OCFO, OGC's Employment and Labor Law Division, and NOAA's Workforce Management Client Services Division.

j. **Regulatory/Administrative Issues.** Correspondence on regulations or civil and administrative cases must be cleared by GCW.

k. **MOAs and MOUs.** Memoranda of Agreement and Memoranda of Understanding must be cleared by DOC General Counsel (GC). Action offices should submit draft MOAs/MOUs to EA, at least 60 days prior to effective date EA will forward to DOC GC for clearance.

NOTE: Clearance by the appropriate Region/Office/Staff director and the Executive Officer, if applicable, must be obtained on all correspondence packages and indicated on the Correspondence Control Sheet. An example of the NWS Correspondence Control Sheet follows this section. Additional clearances (e.g., from Branch and Division staff) are **not** included on the Correspondence Control Sheet.

Sample: NWS Correspondence Control Sheet

Correspondence Control Sheet

BACKGROUND	One paragraph explaining the action-forcing event (no more than 5 sentences)
DISCUSSION	Two to three sentences explaining issues or major points in response
RECOMMENDATION	One sentence explaining what action needs to be done

Coordination/Clearance

Routing Code, Print Name, and Signature	Date	Routing Code, Print Name, and Signature	Date
W/			
W/			
W/			
GCW -			
LAW -			
CFO (if financial/resources issues)			
W/EA – clearance			
Wx11 –			
Wx1 –			
W –			

Reference Number:

Drafted by:

Telephone:

Due:

Due to EA:

Due to NWS:

Due to NOAA:

W, Wx1, Wx11: Please return all correspondence to EA after signature.

NOTE: All reference numbers are assigned by EA only.

2.2.5 Distribution. After signature by the AA/DAA, EA will date stamp the response, make copies for its files, and return the original response and file to the Action Office for distribution.

2.2.6 File Maintenance. It is the responsibility of the Action Office to maintain the official file (with incoming, list of clearances, etc.) for all correspondence unless other arrangements are agreed upon between EA and the Action Office.