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Two new bulletins released in FY10 have been posted to PDSD website.

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A SEASON OF GIVING

During December’s Week of Service at USDA, five PDSD staff members volunteered their services at the D.C. Central Kitchen on Tuesday, December 15th. Kim Elosser, Karen Maguire, Kelly Panganiban, Valerie Ramirez, and Lucy Lew provided a half day of volunteering that included preparing meals for area recipients and assisted the kitchen in their mission plan.

D.C. Central Kitchen’s mission is to use food as a tool to strengthen bodies, empower minds, and build communities. D.C. Central Kitchen provides several different ways for volunteers to get meaningfully engaged work to combat hunger and create opportunity. Their website can be found at http://www.dccentralkitchen.org/ for additional information and for volunteering opportunities.

Above: Kim Elosser, Karen Maguire, Kelly Panganiban, and Valerie Ramirez

PDSD also donated a cart full of food to a single mother with 6 kids from the “People's House.”

All who volunteered and provided donations from PDSD thoroughly enjoyed the experience and look forward to similar opportunities in the future.

We hope everyone had a happy holiday and we look forward to a wonderful new year!
PDSD Bulletin #10-01
NICS Improvement Amendments
Act of 2007 (NIAA)

The National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) is run by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and it checks available records in three databases – the National Crime Information Center (NCIC), the Interstate Identification Index (III), and the NICS Index – to determine if a person is disqualified from receiving firearms.

On January 8, 2008, the President signed NIAA to increase the quantity of information available to NICS by requiring federal departments and agencies to submit relevant information in their possession that demonstrates a person falls within one of the ten categories of persons who are prohibited from receiving firearms under federal law. The ten categories are as follows:

1. Persons who have been convicted in any court of a crime punishable by imprisonment for a term exceeding one year;
2. Persons who are fugitives from justice;
3. Persons who are unlawful users of or addicted to any controlled substance;
4. Persons who have been adjudicated as mentally defective or have been committed to a mental institution;
5. Persons who are aliens and are illegally or unlawfully in the United States;
6. Persons who have been discharged from the U.S. Armed Forces under dishonorable conditions;
7. Persons who, having been citizens of the United States, have renounced their U.S. citizenship;
8. Persons subject to a court order that restrains them from harassing, stalking, or threatening an intimate partner or child of such intimate partner, or from engaging in other conduct that would place the partner or child in reasonable fear of bodily injury;
9. Persons convicted in any court of a misdemeanor crime of domestic violence; and,
10. Persons who are under indictment or information for a crime punishable by imprisonment for a term exceeding one year.

Effective immediately, all Human Resources (HR), Employee Relations (ER), and Personnel Security points-of-contact must report all persons whom fall within one of the ten categories, to John Loveless, Chief of Personnel Security, at john.loveless@usda.gov or (202) 720-7373, within five (5) business days of determining a person falls within one or more of the categories.


PDSD Bulletin #10-02
Mandatory Use of Reciprocity and PIPS Access

Executive Order 13488

On January 16, 2009, the President signed Executive Order 13488, Granting Reciprocity on Excepted Service and Federal Contractor Employee Fitness and Reinvestigating Individuals in Positions of Public Trust. This order mandates reciprocal recognition by Federal agencies on prior suitability determinations. On September 24, 2009, OPM released a memorandum titled “Guidance for Implementing E.O. 13488.”

Effective immediately, agencies shall request from PDSD reciprocal recognition for positions of public trust when the prior favorable suitability determination was based on a current (within 5 years) investigation at the proper level as required by the individual’s current position designation and when the individual has had no break in employment since the favorable determination was made.

OPM has proposed that a person occupying a public trust position be reinvestigated at least once every five years and in anticipation of this change, USDA is implementing this standard until further notice. Reciprocity cannot be granted on a Public Trust position when the prior investigation was completed over five years ago. NOTE: This rule does not apply to Low Risk positions.

PIPS Access

To aid federal Human Resource (HR) officers and federal Personnel Security points-of-contact in verifying prior investigations that were favorably adjudicated to utilize reciprocity for all types of investigations, PDSD will process access requests to OPM’s Personnel Investigations Processing System (PIPS). PIPS maintains the Security/Suitability Investigations Index (SII), a repository of background investigations on federal employees and contractors. PIPS is accessed through OPM’s online Secure Portal.

For access to PIPS, please contact Arviet Thorpe at Arviet.thorpe@usda.gov or (202) 720-4390.

Prevents Unfair Increases in Interest Rates and Changes in Terms
- Prohibits arbitrary interest rate increases and universal default on existing balances;
- Requires a credit card issuer who increases a cardholder’s interest rate to periodically review and decrease the rate if indicated by the review;
- Prohibits credit card issuers from increasing rates on a cardholder in the first year after a credit card account is opened;
- Requires promotional rates to last at least 6 months.

Prohibits Exorbitant and Unnecessary Fees
- Prohibits issuers from charging a fee to pay a credit card debt, whether by mail, telephone, or electronic transfer, except for live services to make expedited payments;
- Prohibits issuers from charging over-limit fees unless the cardholder elects to allow the issuer to complete over-limit transactions, and also limits over-limit fees on electing cardholders;
- Enhances protections against excessive fees on low-credit, high-fee credit cards.

Requires Fairness in Application and Timing of Card Payments
- Requires payments in excess of the minimum to be applied first to the credit card balance with the highest rate of interest;
- Requires credit card statements to be mailed 21 days before the bill is due rather than the current 14.

Protects the Rights of Financially Responsible Credit Card Users
- Prohibits interest charges on debt paid on time (double-cycle billing ban);
- Prohibits late fees if the card issuer delayed crediting the payment;
- Requires credit card companies to consider a consumer’s ability to pay when issuing credit cards or increasing credit limits.

View the entire Act at http://banking.senate.gov/public/_files/051909_CreditCardSummaryFinalPassage.pdf.

Monitoring your credit report for discrepancies is always recommended. You can receive a free annual credit report (once every 12 months) from Equifax, TransUnion, and Experian at https://www.annualcreditreport.com/.

Federal Student Loans: Income Based Repayment (IBR) Plan
Income Based Repayment (IBR) is a new repayment plan for the major types of federal loans made to students. Under IBR, your required monthly payment is capped at an amount that is intended to be affordable based on your income and family size.

Any Stafford, Grad PLUS or Consolidation loan made under either the Direct Loan or FFEL program is eligible for repayment under IBR, EXCEPT loans that are currently in default, parent PLUS Loans, or consolidation loans that repay a parent PLUS Loan. The loans can be new or old, and for any type of education (undergraduate, graduate, professional, job training).

You may enter IBR if your federal student loan debt is high relative to your income and family size. While your lender will perform the calculation to determine your eligibility, you can use the IBR calculator to estimate if you would likely benefit from the IBR plan. It looks at your income, family size, and state of residence to calculate your IBR monthly payment amount. If that amount is lower than the monthly payment under a 10-year standard repayment plan, then you are eligible to repay your loans under IBR.

INTEREST PAYMENT BENEFIT - If your monthly IBR payment does not cover the monthly interest that accrues on the loans, the government will pay your unpaid interest on Subsidized Stafford Loans (either Direct Loan or FFEL) for up to three consecutive years from when you first enter IBR repayment.

10-YEAR PUBLIC SERVICE LOAN FORGIVENESS If you work in public service and have reduced loan payments through IBR, your remaining balance after ten years in a public service job could be cancelled if you made loan payments for each month of those ten years. The Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program is available only if you have Direct Loans and you make 120 monthly payments under the Direct Loan Program.

For more information, visit http://studentaid.ed.gov/students/attachments/siteresources/IBRQ&A_template_123109_FINAL.pdf.
REORGANIZATION OF DEPARTMENTAL ADMINISTRATION


DM, formerly Departmental Administration, is USDA’s central administrative management organization. DM provides budget and fiscal management, human resource, procurement and information technology support to mission areas so that they can serve customers more effectively and efficiently. DM organization is led by Assistant Secretary for Administration, Mr. Pearlie Reed.

OHSEC, a merger of the former Office of Security Services and Homeland Security office, coordinates USDA’s disaster management and emergency planning response activities, oversees continuity planning programs, coordinates USDA’s homeland security policies, and provides physical security policies and oversight. PDSD will continue to focus on safeguarding national security information within USDA by managing security clearances and “Suitability for Employment” determinations for USDA employees in public trust positions, as well as policy development, classified information oversight and training. Todd Repass was named the Director of OHSEC in January 2010.

CLASSIFIED INFORMATION SECURITY UPDATES

PDSD recently sent an email to all of the current USDA Information Security Coordinators to conduct the annual Cost Estimate for Security Classification Activities for 2009. The email contained two attachments with guidelines to follow to provide the required information, which PDSD will consolidate and provide to the Information Security Oversight Office (ISOO) at the National Archives. Please review your input in a timely manner and report your activity to Kara Shields by February 5th. If you have any concerns prior to that, please contact our office at (202) 720-7373. Negative responses are also required.

Additionally, the current administration has made some minor adjustments to the Executive Order 13526 “Classified National Security Information,” as amended. While the changes are minor, the email links below provide access to these orders through the Federal Register.


e-QIP USER’S MANUAL

In December 2009, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) released an updated user’s manual for the Electronic Questionnaires for Investigations Processing System (e-QIP) version 2.00.16.
e-QIP is a web-based automated system that has been developed for OPM, Federal Investigative Services Division, to provide a means to facilitate the processing of standard forms for background investigations.

This user’s manual provides the e-QIP agency user with the information necessary for day-to-day use of the system. It contains security requirements, instructions for data entry, error correction aids, a description of possible responses to prompts issued by the system, and expected output layouts.

User’s who have authorized access to OPM’s Secure Portal can obtain the manual in the Library section. User’s who do not have access to the Secure Portal should contact Arviet Thorpe at Arviet.thorpe@usda.gov or Opal Jones (back-up) at opal.jones@usda.gov to obtain a copy via email.

SECURITY TRAINING TIP

With the beginning of the New Year, it is a great opportunity to review the files within your offices to ensure that you destroy any files that are no longer required. Please make sure that you destroy personnel files that contain Personally Identifiable Information in an approved manner. If you have any filing cabinets or security containers (safes) that are going to be discarded, all files must be cleaned out and drawers pulled completely out and reviewed for any documents that may have fallen under the drawers or behind the drawer in the back of the container. We encourage all offices to use a “second set of eyes” to make sure that the container has been thoroughly reviewed before it is discarded. Please contact our office with any questions or concerns. Questions may be directed to Keith McElfresh, Karen Maguire, or Kara Shields on (202) 720-7373.