

ORM NEWS

**From the Office of the Deputy Assistant
Secretary for Resolution Management
Department of Veterans Affairs**



February 2002

From the Deputy Assistant Secretary

Web-Based Tracking System



In the January 2002, edition of "ORM News," I addressed the importance of having accurate data in the Web-Based Tracking System (WBTS). Let me take a minute to reiterate the importance of the WBTS as a valuable tool in the operation of the Office of Resolution Management (ORM).

Many labor-intensive hours went into the creation of the WBTS that you see on your computers today. We have gone from a few offices using CS-CIMS, excel spreadsheets, and the ITS system to our WBTS. We now have a system that is more user friendly and that captures all of our reporting needs when used properly.

Accurate and timely data is of the utmost importance to ORM's mission. We cannot afford to report inaccurate data to our customers. Reporting inaccurate data does not serve us in creating positive opinions in those who assess the quality of our work. From the beginning of ORM's existence, our customers have questioned our reported number of complaints. Verifying the reported data was difficult in the past. We now have a system that, when used properly, will ensure that our reports are correct. I am asking for your help in this effort. Take the time to check the accuracy of your data prior to submitting it to the permanent record. Please enter your data in a timely manner. If the data is late, then the report is far less useful and essentially inaccurate for our purposes.

Field Offices must systematically check the accuracy of the data at their individual sites. We, here at headquarters, are also conducting periodic checks on the accuracy of the data in the tracking system. Field Offices will be asked to verify any data that appears to be inaccurate. Please remember that the responsibility for ensuring the accuracy of the data in the WBTS belongs to everyone who inputs data into the system. Taking an extra minute to recheck the data you input will maximize the accuracy of the data in the system. We can then provide data to our customers that is correct and ensure that the WBTS becomes a valuable tool, serving you and our customers throughout VA.

Let's strive for 100% accuracy in the WBTS!

/s/

James S. Jones

Highlights of Regulations and Programs

Use of Office of Inspector General Files in the EEO Process

Dana L. Moore, Director, Operational Support Division, provided the following information on the use of Office of Inspector General (OIG) files in the EEO process to ORM in a memorandum dated January 29, 2002.

“We frequently respond to request from EEO investigators for copies of OIG files particularly Hotline files and investigation files. We understand the requested information is necessary to assist in the EEO process. We provide the information requested to ORM because ORM employees have an official need to know the information in question. However, as these files are maintained in Privacy Act systems of records, any further release of the file, or information from the file, must be in accordance with appropriate regulations and statutes.

Our purpose in sending this memo is to advise that my staff will provide, for official purposes of ORM employees only, a clean (or unredacted) copy of a requested OIG file as well as a copy appropriately redacted for release to others. For instance, if an EEO complainant is one of several subjects in an investigation, personal information concerning the other individuals in the case would have to be redacted before a copy could be provided to the complainant. Once the EEO office advises who is to receive copies of a report, my staff can complete the redactions in a timely manner to ensure that the EEO process is not affected.

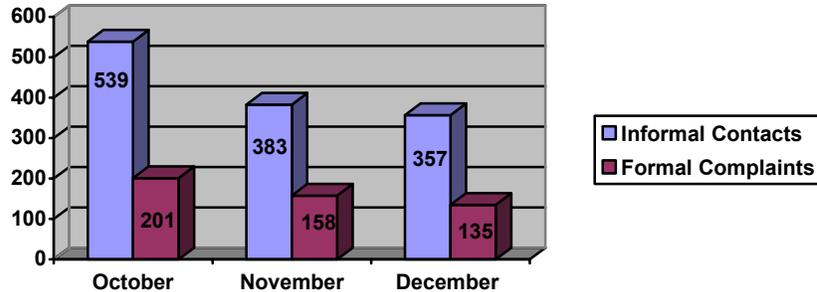
Our goal is to provide ORM, with all relevant information while at the same time protecting the Privacy Act rights of individuals involved in the underlying EEO case. The redacted copy should be the copy that is part of ORM's investigation file. Any request for an OIG file from complainants or witnesses should be referred to the OIG for release.”

Questions concerning this memorandum can be directed to Ms. Shirley Landes, Chief, FOIA Section, Operational Support Division, at (202) 565-8063.

(Terry Washington, External Affairs Program Analyst)

Office of Resolution Management (ORM) Workload Data

Each year, complaint activity generally decreases around the holidays. The first quarter of fiscal year 2002 followed that pattern, as seen in the following chart:



ORM averaged a 62 percent informal resolution rate during the first quarter of FY 2002. That means 62 percent of individuals who made contact with an Equal Employment Opportunity Counselor did not file a formal complaint.

The number of complaints pending more than 180 days declined by 12 percent during the first quarter. Congratulations to our Leavenworth and Palo Alto Field Offices for having no complaints pending more than 180 days, as of December 31, 2001!

EEOC Orders VA to Pay Settlement in Racial Discrimination Suit

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) ordered the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to pay \$192,400 in damages and legal fees stemming from a racial discrimination suit filed against the Martinsburg VA Medical Center in Martinsburg, West Virginia.

The EEOC recently found that the Martinsburg Medical Center failed to address racial discrimination and harassment issues in its carpentry repair shop. Thomas L. Lineberg, who is white, claimed he experienced harassment from other white co-workers for his association with a mostly black crew of carpentry workers. The EEOC order states that Medical Center management knew or should have known that Mr. Lineberg was being subjected to harassment that was racially motivated. It goes on to say that Mr. Lineberg's first line supervisor ignored the harassment and that higher-level management officials failed to properly investigate and take appropriate corrective action. A news article about this EEOC judgement appeared in *The Martinsburg Journal* on January 3, 2002. (Terry Washington, External Affairs Program Analyst)

Social Security Administration Settles Racial Discrimination Suit

In a case involving a substantial monetary settlement for a large class of plaintiffs without litigation, the Social Security Administration has agreed to pay nearly \$7.75 million to settle a racial discrimination complaint by some 2,200 black male employees at the agency's Baltimore headquarters. The case arose out of a class-action complaint that three African-American employees filed in November 1995 with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. They alleged SSA engaged in discriminatory practices against its black male workers regarding promotion decisions, appraisals, salaries and bonuses and disciplinary actions. The settlement, which has no admission of guilt, requires the agency to establish an oversight committee on equal opportunity that will monitor competitive promotions and awards. The seven-member committee will appoint employees as nonvoting members of the agency panels that assess promotion applications. The black men who worked at the agency headquarters or the central operations office since 1987 will receive shares of the total settlement amount, with \$1.4 million going for legal fees and other costs. At a news conference in Washington announcing the settlement, Paul Barnes, the Deputy Social Security Commissioner for Human Resources, noted that over 40 percent of SSA employees are members of minorities and that 27 percent of the SSA work force is African-American. (Reprinted with permission of Federal Employees News Digest)



Investing in Yourself

So what is your co-worker up to? They may be taking a self-paced correspondence course from the USDA Graduate School.

Eighty-one employees have completed correspondence programs with USDA since ORM began offering these courses.

Thirty-three employees chose English and Writing classes. These have been the most widely chosen subjects. The courses pursued in this area included: Communication Skills for the Office Professional, Grammar and Punctuation, Reading Comprehension, Vocabulary, Writing Short Informational Reports and Think Critically, Write Critically. Eighteen participants elected to study courses involving EEO issues. These included: EEO Counseling, EEO's Place in the Federal Government, Introduction to Federal EEO, and Preventing Sexual Harassment in the Workplace. Twelve employees selected courses on supervision in the following areas: Assertive Supervisors, Time Management, Improving Employee Performance, Introduction to Human Resources, Introduction to Supervision and Planning and Describing Positions. The remaining 18 employees elected to study courses involving classification, employee and labor relations, staffing and statistics.

For more information on how you can enroll in one of these self-study courses, see your supervisor. We at Learning Resources are also available to answer any questions you may have concerning this program. Call us at 319-727-1197.

(Charlene Jones, ORM Learning and Resource Center)

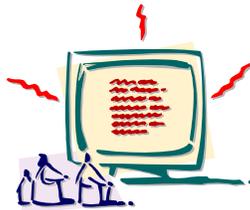


Quick Tips on Telephone Courtesy

The following are a few quick tips on telephone courtesy:

- **Demonstrate telephone courtesy.** The tone and pitch of your voice can assure the caller that you are sincere, friendly and that you are listening. Create a vision for your caller that you are responsible and dedicated to resolving his or her issue.
- **Smile while you answer the telephone.** Your customers will notice it and appreciate a pleasant atmosphere.
- **Talk in a low voice and do not speak too rapidly.** This will portray an image of being helpful and in control.
- **Identify yourself as soon as possible in the call.**
- **Listen carefully.** Listen as if you mean it. The greatest compliment to another person is listening to them. Take a few notes, ask clarifying questions, and show some reaction to what is being said.
- **Tell the caller the name of the person he or she is being transferred to.**
- **Keep calls as short as possible.**
- **Keep calm.** Don't argue with unreasonable customers. Propose alternatives.
- **Thank the caller for calling.** Positive feedback is always important.

What's Happening in the Field?



ORM Managers Meeting

The Office of Resolution Management (ORM) held a joint Managers Meeting with Veterans Health Administration (VHA) EEO Managers and the Office of Civil Rights in Washington, DC on January 29 -31, 2002.

Speakers at this meeting included Dr. Jacob Lozada, Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration, Tim S. McClain, General Counsel, and Charles DeLobe, Director, Office of Employment Discrimination Complaint Adjudication.

General topics discussed during this meeting included the role and responsibilities of the Office of General Counsel, trends and workload status reports on EEO investigations and suggestions for improvement of EEO investigations. Topics specific to ORM included ORM's EEO complaint Web Based Tracking System, Internal Business Plan (IBP), and Workload Report.

Discussions were also held on the possibility of a jointly sponsored project between ORM and VHA to improve EEO programs throughout VA. A set of collaborative initiatives was developed during this meeting.

The next ORM Manager's Meeting will be held in the West Los Angles, CA area in April 2002.

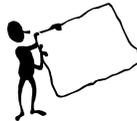
Bay Pines Field Office

The Bay Pines Field Office recently held employee orientation for new employees of the VA Police and Security Service. This orientation included sexual harassment training and an overview of ORM's policies and procedures.

Bill Low, Field Director, and *Dale Leftridge*, Administrative Officer, met with Regional Counsel, Bay Pines, and the Regional Counselor ADR Coordinator, to discuss ADR training and site visits to facilities.

Staff members joined Bill N. Low, Regional EEO Officer, in donating gifts and educational toys for the YMCA Rainbow Village Child Care Center. Each year, children at the YMCA Child Care Center prepare their own ornaments for their "Giving Tree." In the ornaments they write the names of the gifts they would like to receive from community "Santas". This year their dreams became a reality thanks to the donations made by the staff at the Bay Pines. Tatianna Hicks, YMCA Child Care Counselor, accepted the gifts on behalf of the YMCA Rainbow Village Child Care Center. The YMCA Rainbow Village Child Care Center is located in Largo, FL, within the public housing area known as Rainbow Village.

Special Employee Announcements



Leavenworth Field Office

Charlotte A. Jones of the Leavenworth Field Office will be a guest speaker at the Blacks in Government (BIG) of Kansas City, Inc., 10th Annual Training Seminar and 20th Annual Awards Ceremony on February 8, 2002. The theme for this year is: "Accept the Challenge, Exceed the Standard through Professional Development."

The VA Eastern Kansas Health Care System's EEO Committee sent a copy of its October 2001 newsletter, *VA Eastern Kansas Health Care System*, to our Leavenworth office. It features a picture of **Richard Tilden**, EEO Counselor, on the front page. They also sent a letter thanking Richard for his participation in their Cultural Competency Seminar 2001. Richard shared his personal experiences, accomplishments and challenges to a diverse audience of employees, veterans and volunteers attending the seminar.

Little Rock Field Office

Willie (Rudy) McIntosh, EEO Investigator, accompanied his wife, Karen, who is a registered nurse, to Washington, D.C., where she was presented an award for her outstanding contribution and support to the VA Homeless Program.

Did You Know?



VA Observes Black History Month

The month of February has traditionally been designated as Black History Month. The national theme selected by the Carter G. Woodson Foundation for this year's observance is "The Color Line Revisited: Is Racism Dead?"

In 1915, educator and historian Dr. Carter G. Woodson founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, which was later, renamed the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History. It was through this organization that Negro History Week was first established in 1926, and subsequently in 1976, that Black History Month was born. VA staff comprise 24.1 percent African Americans. Let us take this time to thank them for the many contributions they make on a daily basis in serving our Nation's veterans. Black History Month extends to all VA employees an opportunity to learn more about the sacrifices made by those we serve, and it recognizes that their legacy lives on each day in all we do. (VACO News)

President's Day – February 18, 2001



Until 1971, both February 12 and February 22 were observed as federal public holidays to honor the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln (February 12) and George Washington (February 22). In 1971 President Richard Nixon proclaimed one single federal public holiday, Presidents' Day, to be observed on the 3rd Monday of February, honoring all past presidents of the United States of America.



Valentine's Day – February 14th

Saint Valentine's Day

The popular customs associated with Saint Valentine's Day undoubtedly had their origin in a conventional belief generally received in England and France during the Middle Ages, that on 14 February, i.e. half way through the second month of the year, the birds began to pair. Thus in Chaucer's *Parliament of Foules* we read:

For this was sent on Seynt Valentyne's day
Whan every foul cometh ther to choose his mate.

For this reason the day was looked upon as specially consecrated to lovers and as a proper occasion for writing love letters and sending lovers' tokens.

Dates For Long-Term Care Early Enrollment, Open Season Announced

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has announced the dates for the Federal Long-Term Care Insurance Program (LTCIP) early enrollment and open season. The early enrollment will run from March 25 - May 15, 2002. OPM cautions, however, that early enrollment is designed only for those who are already very familiar with long term care and long term care insurance. For most people, OPM says, early enrollment is not a good idea. They need the benefits of the extensive educational campaign that OPM is preparing with John Hancock and MetLife insurance companies. For those not participating in the early enrollment period, open season will run from July 1 through December 31, 2002. OPM says that details on early enrollment and the open season will be available shortly.

We'll keep you informed!

(John Sampson, Employee Relations Specialist)

Scholarships Available to Federal Employees

The Federal Employee Education & Assistance Fund (FEEA) has awarded over 2.75 million in college scholarships exclusively to federal and postal employees and their family members.

FEEA scholarship applications are available from January through March each year. Awards generally range from \$300 to \$1,500.

Eligible applicants include current civilian federal and postal employees with at least three years of federal service and their dependent family members (children and spouses).

Employee applicants may be part-time students; dependents must be full-time. All applicants must be enrolled or plan to enroll in an accredited post secondary school in a course of study that will lead to a two-year, four-year or graduate degree. All applicants must have at least a 3.0 grade point average.

Awards are strictly merit based.

For more information, send a self-addressed, stamped, business sized envelope

to: FEEA Scholarships
Suite 200
8441 W. Bowles Ave.
Littleton, CO 80123-9501

You can also visit their Web site at www.feea.org.

Reminders:

- Click on ORM's Web site at <http://vaww.va.gov/orm> for the latest information on ORM programs, policies, and employee information.

Remember! Assistance is available to ORM employees through our Employee Assistance Program with Green Spring Health Services. If you are in need of some type of counseling as a result of the recent terrorist activities, you are encouraged to call 1 (800) 523-5015. Employees in the DC Metro area can also call Linda Smith at (202) 273-5015.

For assistance with computer problems contact the ITS Help Desk at (202) 273-6676 or send an e-mail to ORM.Help@orm.va.gov.

Visit the EEOC Web site www.eeoc.gov for current information on EEOC programs, decisions and other information relevant to the EEO process.

The Office of the Deputy Secretary for Resolution Management publishes ORM News monthly. It is intended for ORM employees. Please E-mail Terry Washington, External Affairs Program Analyst or Tyrone Eddins, External Affairs Program Manager, to submit your recommendations, suggestions, or comments on information presented in this newsletter. We can be reached at (202) 501-2800. Back copies of the newsletter can be found on ORM's Web site at <http://www.va.gov/orm/NewsEvents.htm>.

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