

ORM NEWS

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



March 2003

From the Deputy Assistant Secretary



“What they are saying”

One of the benefits of my trips around the country is that I get to hear about the positive things being accomplished by our employees.

On a recent trip to Las Vegas and Dayton, I heard some unsolicited praise for the work you do. In Las Vegas the “Lead” EEO Managers talked to me about the positive relationships they have with our employees and how we can work together to make even greater progress toward resolving complaints or completing investigations in a more effective and timely manner. In addition, an attorney talked about the high quality of our procedural decisions. She also talked about how we are frequently referred to as the example of how to do EEO related work by both OEDCA and the EEOC. The increase in the number of requests we get for mediation training and for establishing ADR programs says the same thing about those areas.

Recently, I had a lengthy discussion with a facility director about how beneficial our environmental assessment program was to him and the employees at his facility. At the end of our conversation, he indicated that he would ask us to come back in a year and conduct a follow-up assessment to check on the progress his facility has made in addressing its workplace environment. Other areas we can point to where we have made significant improvements are the quality of our counseling, investigations, and procedural decisions. While we have much more to do, our efforts to improve upon our core services and expand the programs we offer are bringing us positive results.

These comments, and others like them, indicate the effectiveness of our work and the value it adds to VA. We are helping to move VA toward our target of being an Employer-of Choice. **KEEP UP THE GREAT WORK!**

James S. Jones

Articles in this month’s edition of ORM News include:

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Highlights of Regulations and Programs

Project Refresh Reminder!

Project Refresh is underway and our Information Technology Support staff will soon be visiting each ORM field and satellite office. It is important that employees take the recommended steps to back-up the data on your computer hard drive in anticipation of the de-installing or removal of your old system and the installation of your new system.



Our ITS staff will be visiting the Lyons Field Office the week of March 3, 2003. They are also scheduled to visit the Bedford Field Office the week of March 10, 2003, and will be in Washington, D.C. the week of March 17, 2003.

Just to remind you, de-installing your old systems means that you will no longer have access to the programs and data stored on your existing hard drives. Once these systems are physically removed from your spaces, the hard drives in these old systems will be “wiped clean”. This means that all programs and data on these drives will be permanently destroyed!

Click on the ORM ITS web site at <http://vaww.va.gov/orm/ITS/ITS.htm> and go to “Tip of the Month” for more information on how to save your files to the H drive instead of your C drive. Stay ahead of the crowd, learn from the best and be ready for refresh!

For more information contact the Information Technology Support (ITS) Help Desk at (202) 501 2851 or send an e-mail to “ORM Help.”

Cyber Security Training

Have you completed your cyber security training update this year? If not, this is your reminder. You can go to the VA cyber security Web site at <http://vaww.infosec.va.gov/SecurityAwareness/course/index.asp> to take this course.



The course lets you e-mail your supervisor a confirmation message that you have completed it. This awareness course is constantly updated to ensure you get the latest information in security. To learn more about the importance of cyber security in your job, contact the ITS Help Desk or our ITS staff.

Computer Use Reminders

If you are a VA computer user, whether you work at VA headquarters or in a field office, you have an obligation to protect VA information assets.

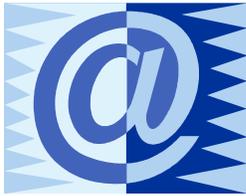
- Use VA computers only for lawful and authorized purposes. Comply with safeguards, policies, and procedures to prevent unauthorized access to VA computer systems.
- Do not install software on your computer that is not authorized as essential to the accomplishment of your official duties.
- Safely handle, store, and dispose of sensitive information, including that on paper.
- Do not e-mail sensitive information just for the sake of convenience.
- Do not open unsolicited or suspicious e-mail messages or their attachments, do not forward chain mail, and do not generate or send offensive or inappropriate e-mail messages, graphical images, or sound files. Limit distribution of e-mail to only those who need to receive it.
- When your workstation begins an update of its anti-virus software, let that update finish. Use authorized virus-scanning software on your workstation or PC and your home computer. Know the source before using diskettes or downloading files. Scan files for viruses before execution.
- Log-off when your workstation is left unattended. (Consider using a password-protected screen saver if you do not have a system that allows you to log-off).
- Choose good passwords and change them every 90 days. Do not write down or share your logon or account password with anyone. Recognize the accountability assigned to your User ID and password. Each user must have a unique ID to access VA systems. Recognize that User IDs are used to identify an individual's actions on VA systems and the Internet. Individual user activity is recorded; including sites and files accessed on the Internet (recorded as the files go through the firewall).
- Ensure that your data are backed up, tested, and stored safely. Comply with terms of software licenses and only use VA-licensed and authorized software. Do not install single-license software on shared hard drives (or servers).



***Taken from the "VA Cyber Security Awareness Course."**

E-mail Use and Security

In VA, e-mail is a vital communications tool. Proper use of VA e-mail is essential to ensure that this resource is uninterrupted. Chain letters and hoax messages rob us of valuable computer space and processing speed. Just delete these messages, do not forward or reply with stop or unsubscribe requests. These messages are sent by the thousands and slow down VA email systems.



- Sensitive information should not be sent by e-mail unless it can be done securely.
- Before you include sensitive information in an e-mail or attachment, you must ensure that it can be sent securely. Check with your supervisor or Information Security Officer (ISO) if you have any questions.

E-mail Risks

- E-mail is not private

VA computer users should have no expectation of privacy associated with the information they store in or send through VA information systems.

- E-mail is not secure

Some viruses attack e-mail systems, making them unavailable. Many viruses use e-mail systems to spread.

*In addition to damage from viruses, e-mails can be subject to loss of confidentiality. If e-mail is compromised, impersonation and hoaxes can create serious problems.

E-mail Responsibilities

- Communicate clearly and appropriately.
- Do not forward hoax or rumor-filled e-mails.
- Do not send illegal or inappropriate transmissions.

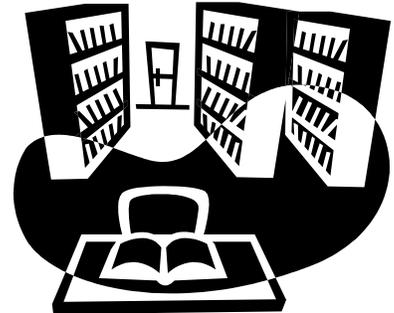
*Taken from the "VA Cyber Security Awareness Course."

Federal Employee Education and Assistance College Scholarship Program

The following January 14, 2003, article “Scholarships available to help feds with tuition” by Tanya N. Ballard comes from GovExec.com.

Applications for the 2003-2004 Federal Employee Education and Assistance college scholarship program are now available.

FEEA, a 17-year-old nonprofit organization that helps federal employees and their families in need, provides annual scholarships to help federal employees or their dependents pay for college tuition. Over the years, FEEA has awarded more than \$3 million in college scholarships to federal and postal employees and their family members. Scholarships range from \$300 to \$1,500 per student, depending on the amount of federal employee donations received by FEEA through the Combined Federal Campaign.



Applicants can be high school seniors, full-time college students or graduate students with a minimum 3.0 grade point average. Federal employee applicants may be part-time students, but must have at least three years of experience as a civilian federal employee or postal worker.

Potential applicants can find more information and download an application at [FEEA's Web site](#). Applications must be postmarked by March 28, and awards will be announced in August in time for the start of the academic year. To receive an application by mail, send a self-addressed, stamped business-size envelope to:

FEEA Scholarships
8441 W. Bowles Ave., Suite 200
Littleton, Colo. 80123-9501

Family Emergency Plan for VA Employees

VA has issued "Family Emergency Plan for VA Employees." All VA offices must ensure that each employee receives a copy of this brochure to assist them in developing their own effective family emergency plans.

This brochure is intended to raise the awareness of the need to plan for potential incidents. It will enhance your capacity to effectively manage potential risks on the job and at home.

Emergency preparedness is a shared responsibility. Prepared employees will provide enhanced service to our veterans.

You can obtain a copy of this brochure by clicking on [http://vaww.va.gov/February2003FamilyEmergencyPlanforVAEmployees\(Final\).pdf](http://vaww.va.gov/February2003FamilyEmergencyPlanforVAEmployees(Final).pdf)

Office Notes

Houston Field Office

Hwa-soon (Sue) Thorson, C-2, Houston/Leavenworth Satellite Office recently completed the successful mediation of an EEOC case referred to the KC Federal Executive Board Shared Neutrals Program. She also completed an investigation of a discrimination complaint at the Federal Labor Relations Authority (FLRA).

Little Rock Field Office

Austin Lewis, Little Rock Field Manager, and **William Suddeth**, Intake Specialist, conducted EEO training at the Oklahoma City VAMC from February 3rd to February 5th. Six classes, attended by 423 employees, were held. The training was well received by both managers and employees alike. In addition, Mr. Lewis met with Medical Center Director Steven Gentling, his staff, and the facility mediation coordinator and Regional Counsel, as well as facility union officials.

U.S. Treasury Bonds



The Treasury Department announced that the minimum holding period that applies to United States Savings Bonds would be extended from six to twelve months, effective February 1, 2003. The minimum holding period is the length of time from issue date that a bond must be held before it is eligible for redemption. Series EE or I bonds issued February 2003 or later must be held for twelve months before cashing or exchanging. Bonds issued January 2003 or earlier will continue to have the six-month minimum holding period.

Individual investors who are saving for the longer term will not be affected by the lengthened holding period. The new holding period will prevent purchasers from taking advantage of the current spread between savings bond returns and historically low short-term interest rates by cashing in bonds after six months. Savings Bonds are designed to be a long-term savings vehicle.

All other terms and conditions that apply to Series EE and I bonds remain unchanged. Interest on both series accrues monthly and compounds semiannually. Bonds held less than five years are subject to a three-month interest penalty.

More information about United States Savings Bonds can be found on the Web site www.savingsbonds.gov.

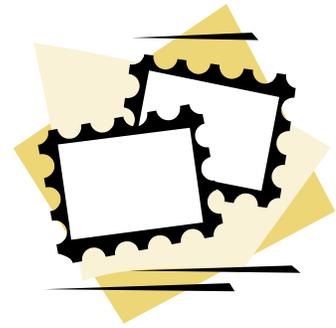
HEY VA! HAVE YOU HEARD?

Love your heart! The Nation's leading killers are heart disease and stroke. Twenty-five percent of the US (61 million people) lives with heart disease. One American dies every 33 seconds from heart disease (950,000 each year). Here's how to get your heart healthy today!

- Eat healthy normal portion sizes -- less junk food!
 - Lose/control weight -- 20 pounds overweight is a risk factor.
 - Get physical -- 30 minutes of physical activity each day.
 - Stop smoking -- smoking doubles your risk.
 - Keep blood pressure and cholesterol in the normal ranges.
 - Get help and support -- ask for help if you're not sure you can make the necessary changes.

- For additional information on "How to get Heart Healthy," check the VA National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention's Web site at <http://vaww.nchdpd.med.va.gov/>.

Breast Cancer Awareness Postage Stamps



The US Postal Service recently released its new "Fund the Cure" stamp to help fund breast cancer research. The stamp was designed by Ethel Kessler of Bethesda, Maryland. It is important that we take a stand against this disease that kills and maims so many of our mothers, sisters, and friends. Instead of the normal \$.37 for a stamp, this one costs \$.45.

The additional \$.08 will go to breast cancer research. A "normal" book costs \$7.40, this is \$9.00. It takes a minute at the Post Office to ask for this special stamp and it means so much to help find a cure for this deadly disease. An additional \$35,000,000 for this vital research will be raised if all of these stamps are sold. Just as important as the money is our support for this important effort.

What a statement it would make if the stamp outsold the lottery. What a statement it would make to show that we care. Many of us know women and their families whose lives are turned upside-down by breast cancer. It takes so little to do so much in this drive. Thanks to Maurice Holman of the Hines Field Office for sharing this information.

ORM NEWS is a monthly publication of the Office of Resolution Management. Please E-mail Terry Washington, External Affairs Program Analyst, or Tyrone Eddins, External Affairs Program Manager, to submit your recommendations, suggestions, or comments on the 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>.