

**Nashville District**  
**Human Resources Newsletter**  
**"News You Can Use"**  
Issue 04-01-03  
1 April 2003

The purpose of this newsletter is to keep Nashville District employees informed about personnel issues, concerns, and topics. You are encouraged to review the information and disseminate to your organization. If there are particular areas of interest that you would like to see addressed in future issues, an article of general interest, or general comments, please contact John Restey at 615-736-5538 or [John.G.Restey@lrm02.usace.army.mil](mailto:John.G.Restey@lrm02.usace.army.mil).

## General News:

### Building Excellence with Human Capital

The Office of Personnel Mgmt has designed a web site where you can keep up with the changes, information and results of the President's Management Agenda items. Transforming the Federal workforce is perhaps one of the most important issues being addressed in Washington today. Keeping yourself informed on the issues and the initiatives is important in understanding where you, the Federal Employee, can significantly contribute to the success of the committed and dedicated public servant.

*"The strategic management of human capital calls for a transformation in the employment, deployment, development and evaluation of the Federal workforce with results in mind." Kay Coles James, Director of OPM*

The new OPM site is dedicated to bringing you information and resources that can be used to assess, formulate and implement human capital strategies.

As part of the President's Management Agenda, OPM is leading the Federal Government's Strategic Management of Human Capital Initiative. The foundation for this website is the Human Capital Standards for Success, a joint product of OPM, [OMB](http://www.omb.gov) <<http://www.omb.gov>> and [GAO](http://www.gao.gov) <<http://www.gao.gov>>. OPM has developed a Human Capital Assessment and Accountability Framework to guide agencies toward achieving these Standards and is structured to help you determine what you need to do, how you can do it, and how you can measure your own human capital success. A successful Human Capital Initiative requires a collaborative effort among all interested

parties to ensure the American people that human capital is used strategically to support agency missions. To read more about the President's Mgmt Agenda and the Human Capital initiatives, go to: [<http://apps.opm.gov/humancapital/>](http://apps.opm.gov/humancapital/) TAKEN FROM OPM.GOV

## **Performs Other Duties as Assigned**

Federal employees sometimes are confused or concerned about the term "performs other duties as assigned". Such reluctance or refusal is based on an erroneous idea that an employee is not required to perform any duty "that's not in my job description". This concept could not be further from the truth.

A position description (PD) does not require nor should it contain a detailed description covering every feature of a position and the conditions under which it will be performed. A position description is adequate if it sets out the principal duties, responsibilities, and supervisory relationships in such a way that the job may be properly classified. The PD is not a prescription of duties; it is simply a report of the MAJOR duties of a given position as they exist at any given time. It in no way interferes with the right of a supervisor to assign other (minor) duties. i.e., minor duties performed occasionally or for a small amount of time need not be included in the PD.

The original reason for requiring the statement "Performs other Duties as Assigned" on all job descriptions was to establish the principle that the assignment of duties to employees was not limited by the contents of the PD. The phrase is included in PD's to cover unexpected tasks or situations, which arise from time-to-time in any organization, and is included with the assumption that neither the supervisor nor the employee will abuse the privilege of its being there. It is assumed that all will utilize it in a spirit of cooperation. Otherwise, if the clerk who answers the telephone is on leave, do we let the phone just ring until he/she returns? If correspondence needs to be written or a report compiled, should you refuse because it's not your assignment? **The answers must be no.**

The main requirement is that the employee who is asked to "perform other duties" is capable of performing the task without a hazard to self, others, or damage to equipment or buildings. The assignment should be reasonably related to the employee's position/qualifications and not reflect a change in the "conditions of employment" for the employee.

## **OPM Adds Vital WEB Page for MGRS and Employees on Dealing with Emergencies**

OPM stands ready to inform government officials, media and the general public of their response and operations during a crisis or emergency. Their web page provides a ready resource for you to quickly and easily locate information and guidance they have published.

# Emergency Preparedness Guide

Download  
Manager's  
Guide 

Download  
Employee's  
Guide 

Download  
Manager's  
Guide 

Download  
Employee's  
Guide 

## [Comment on these Guides](#)

### [Resources](#)

- [Educational video for people who process, sort, or deliver mail](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/documentsapp/Anthrax/01042002/ProtectingYourHealth.asp)  
<<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/documentsapp/Anthrax/01042002/ProtectingYourHealth.asp>>
- [Frequently Asked Questions on Military Leave](http://www.opm.gov/oca/leave/html/milqa.asp)  
<<http://www.opm.gov/oca/leave/html/milqa.asp>>
- [Emergency Guide Memos](http://www.opm.gov/oca/compmemo/emerg.asp)  
<<http://www.opm.gov/oca/compmemo/emerg.asp>>
- [Operating Status for the Washington, DC Area](http://www.opm.gov/status/)  
<<http://www.opm.gov/status/>>
- [Our Listing of FEB Sites](http://www.feb.gov) <<http://www.feb.gov>>
- [Anthrax and Other Bioterrorism Issues - Portal for Federal Managers](http://www.opm.gov/ehs/terrorism.asp)  
<<http://www.opm.gov/ehs/terrorism.asp>>
- [Managers Handbook on Handling Traumatic Events](http://www.opm.gov/ehs/html/toc.asp)  
<<http://www.opm.gov/ehs/html/toc.asp>>
- [Questions and Answers on Potential Exposure to Anthrax](http://www.opm.gov/oca/pay/html/ANQA2.htm)  
<<http://www.opm.gov/oca/pay/html/ANQA2.htm>>

People who are Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing, Deaf-Blind, and/or people with speech disabilities may call the Federal Relay Service on **1-800-877-8339**. TAKEN FROM OPM.GOV

## [Helping Our Children Deal With War](#)

In this time of heightened anxiety over impending war with Iraq, our children are experiencing fear and anxiety too. They're seeing news reports and hearing people around them talk about the war and terrorist threats here at home. But unlike adults, children have little experience to help them put all this information into perspective.

Whatever their age or relationship to adults who are involved in the war effort, children need to be able to express their feelings and concerns about the war. As adults, it's our job to encourage them to talk, listen to them and answer questions they may have.

### *Things to remember with all children:*

- Acknowledge children's worries and uncertainties about war. Reassure them that their feelings are normal.
- Children's reactions to the war may be heavily influenced by your own. Your reactions are key in helping children decide whether the world is a safe or scary place.
- Children need comforting and frequent reassurance that they're safe - make sure you give it to them.
- Provide activities for children that help them explore their feelings, such as classroom discussions, informal play, community service projects, and writing, music, art or drama projects.
- Maintain family routines and keep the lines of communication open.
- Create a family plan to follow in the event of an emergency.

**Here are some more tips on how to help children of all ages deal with the subject of war:**

#### Pre-school age children

- Reassure preschoolers that they're safe. Provide extra comfort and contact by discussing their fears, staying in touch during the day and giving lots of hugs.
- Get a better understanding of their feelings about the war. Encourage them to draw pictures about the war and then discuss them. This offers insight into children's particular concerns or fears.
- How you say something is perhaps as important as what you say. Three- to five-year-olds look to their parents and other important adults in their lives to gauge their reactions and decide how they should feel. If they see worry and fear in the adults around them, they are likely to become worried and afraid. But if routine and calmness reigns, most preschoolers will equate thoughts of war with a faraway place.
- Don't be caught off guard if certain behaviors reappear or intensify in children. Children aren't misbehaving if they return to bedwetting, thumb sucking, baby talk or fear of sleeping alone, or if they complain of stomachaches or headaches and don't want to go to school. They're expressing their fear.

#### Grade-school age children

- Expect questions about the war from this age group. Try to answer them in simple and clear language. Use a map or globe to illustrate how far away the war is. Also, explain that the police and many others are working hard to keep us safe here at home.
- If a child is concerned about a family member, such as a parent, serving overseas, don't tell them not to worry. Explain that a lot of people are also concerned about

Mom or Dad being safe and that Mom or Dad have practiced their job a lot for this moment in time.

- Be honest. False reassurance doesn't help this age group. Don't say nobody will die. Children know this isn't true. Instead say, "I will always be here to keep you safe" or "Adults are working very hard to make things safe."
- Monitor their television viewing. Limit the amount of war coverage they see. Schedule an alternate activity during the news hour without calling attention to your real concern. A walk around the block, homework, a good movie on the VCR or a fun dinner around the table won't necessarily make kids feel like they're being restricted.
- Don't be afraid to say I don't know. Part of keeping an open dialogue with your children is not being afraid to say that you don't have all the answers. When you don't, explain that wars are very complicated and things happen that even adults don't understand.

### Middle- and high school age youth

- Plan for shared time in front of a reliable national newscast. Because the war will be discussed in school every day, your teen may be more ready to talk when he or she gets home than you'd guess. This is a good opportunity for conversation.
- Discussing history with this age group can help put the war and related politics in context.
- Get teens to open up about what they've heard each day about the war. Use the opportunity to correct any misinformation they may have acquired.
- This age group may ask very technical or even grisly questions that may seem off the wall to you. Take each question seriously and do the best you can to answer it.
- Encourage them to work out their own positions on the war - even if it differs from your own. This is an age when kids are developing personal ethics and morals, a process you can support with open discussion and debate.
- Create a family plan to follow in the event of an emergency. Make sure that each family member has everyone's phone/cell numbers and knows where to meet. This will make teens feel safer and may help reduce panic if an emergency does occur.

Information courtesy of the National Mental Health Association

## **War Related Issues**

*Dealing with the stress of it all*

The war with Iraq and threat of terrorist attacks at home are creating varying levels of stress for all Americans. When prolonged, stress can chip away at one's mental and physical health. Stress makes it increasingly hard to cope with everyday tasks and puts you at risk for a number of health problems, such as high blood pressure.

If you've been carrying around too much stress lately, it's possible to deal with it and even redirect it in positive ways to help you get through the challenging days ahead.

Here are the warning signs of *stress overload*:

- persistent fatigue
- inability to concentrate
- flashes of anger - lashing out at family and friends
- changes in eating or sleeping habits
- increased use of alcohol, tobacco or drugs
- repeated tension headaches, lower back aches, stomach problems or other physical ailments
- prolonged feelings of depression, anxiety or helplessness

These are steps you can take to get out from under the stress:

- **Stay connected.** You're not alone in this, so don't withdraw. Talk to family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers about your stress and fears. They may be experiencing some of the same feelings as you. Possibly they can share something helpful.

Other sources of support may be your place of worship or your company's employee assistance program, which may offer the first few mental health consultations free of charge. Dependents of military personnel should find out what kind of assistance is available through their branch's family services.

- **Get physical.** Reduce stress by developing a regular exercise routine. Try walking around the block each evening, playing tennis, working in the garden or just doing stretching exercises in your living room.
- **Avoid drugs and alcohol.** Just like stress, they rob you of energy and cloud your perceptions of everyone and everything.
- **Make time for relaxation.** Try to reduce the amount of time you spend worrying about things you can't control. A good way to do this is to cut down or eliminate activities that cause you stress. For example, spend less time watching the news and more time relaxing. Catch a movie, join a club, call a friend, go fishing, go to a concert or play with the dog. Schedule time for doing things you find relaxing.
- **Take back some control.** You can't control the war or events at home associated with it, but you can exercise control over some things. Maintain your routine as much as possible. Try writing a letter to a friend or relative serving overseas. Attend a meeting on community preparedness. Send a donation to a relief fund. Volunteer. There are many organizations that could use your help.
- **Take reasonable precautions.** Make an emergency communications plan with family and friends. Re-introduce yourself to neighbors and exchange phone/cell phone numbers. Stay informed about current events, but don't become obsessed by the news coverage of impending war.

- **Be optimistic about the challenges ahead.** Try to maintain a positive outlook. Remember that our nation has survived other difficult times. Stay in touch with your spirituality, if you find it comforting.
- **Seek professional help** if you feel your problem is more serious and you are experiencing thoughts of suicide, hopelessness or extreme anger. This could be especially important for those who live with depression, substance abuse problems, anxiety or post-traumatic stress disorder. Your local mental health association can help you find a social worker, psychologist or psychiatrist in your community.

[Information courtesy of the National Mental Health Association](#)

## Health And Benefits:

### Status of Retroactive Pay Increase

The Bush administration still has not issued guidance on how it will carry out the additional one percent increase in the 2003 federal pay raise enacted into law last month. No decision has been made on whether the extra one percent will be paid across the board or divided up as locality pay. It is uncertain when employees will start seeing the increase in their pay and when they will get the retroactive amount due.

### Thrift Savings Plan Open Season

The next Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) Open Season will begin on 15 April 2003 and will close on 30 June 2003. TSP changes are completed telephonically (877-276-9287) or through the web at <http://cpol.army.mil/abc>. You still need to complete forms to designate beneficiaries and request loans and withdrawals. You can get TSP forms from the TSP web site at <http://www.tsp.gov>.

### Travel Card for PCS

Effective 1 February 2003, the government travel card can not be used for any expenses associated with a permanent change of station (PCS) move.

### FEHB and Transitional TRICARE

An employee who is called to active military service can either have his or her FEHB coverage continue for up to 18 months or elect to terminate coverage. If the employee elects to terminate FEHB coverage at the beginning of the leave of absence, the

regulations at 5 CFR 890.305(a) state that the enrollment is automatically reinstated on the day the employee is restored to a civilian position pursuant to part 353.

However, the National Defense Authorization Act for 2002 (Public Law 107-107) provided transitional healthcare under the Military Healthcare System, including TRICARE, to military members of Reserve components ordered to active duty for more than 30 days in support of a contingency operation. Depending on total active federal military service, the military member and dependent family members are entitled to either 60 days or 120 days of TRICARE transitional health care after separation from active duty.

Because of the availability of this new benefit, some employees may not want to have their FEHB automatically reinstated. OPM has determined that if an employee waives his or her rights to immediate reinstatement of FEHB to take advantage of transitional TRICARE benefits, agencies may delay reinstatement until the transitional TRICARE ends.

OPM is currently working on a Benefits Administration Letter that will provide detailed information. In the meantime, agencies should have employees who don't want their FEHB automatically reinstated sign a statement waiving their rights. The statement should specifically state:

- \* The employee is waiving his or her rights to immediate reinstatement of FEHB to take advantage of transitional TRICARE benefits.

- \* The employee understands that it is his or her responsibility to notify the agency when the transitional TRICARE ends so that he or she can enroll in FEHB again.

## Food For Thought:

### **Farmer's Work ethic:**

**You don't have to wear a watch because it doesn't matter what time it is. You work until you're done or it's too dark to see.**