

DHS TODAY

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

February 20, 2004

Vol. 2, No. 5

DHS TODAY is a weekly employee e-newsletter produced by the Department of Homeland Security, Office of Public Affairs.

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I. HR Design News Corner: Proposed Regulations Now Published; FAQ

The proposed regulations for the Department's new HR System have been published in the *Federal Register*. They also can be accessed online at www.epa.gov/edocket. All employees, along with members of the public, now have an opportunity to review and submit formal comments on the proposed system. The deadline for submitting public comments is March 22, 2004.

There are two methods for submitting public comment:

- ***Via the Internet***

Proposed regulations and background information on the HR Design process can be found online at www.epa.gov/edocket. This site includes a link to the proposed DHS regulations and instructions for submitting public comment electronically.

- ***Via U.S. Mail***

Written submissions, referencing DHS/OPM and docket number (DHS-2004-001), can be sent to:

DHS/OPM HR System Public Comments

PO BOX 14474
Washington, D.C. 20044-4474

For additional information, a fact sheet highlighting key aspects of the proposed system is currently available on DHS.gov. To access this fact sheet, visit:
(http://www.dhs.gov/interweb/assetlibrary/DHS_Fact_Sheet_FINAL.doc).

Over the next few weeks in the HR Design News Corner we will detail specifics of proposed changes in the areas of pay, classification, performance management, labor relations, adverse actions, and appeals.

Please keep in mind that these are *proposed* regulations and are subject to change based on careful consideration of the input received during the public comment period. In the interim, any changes made to current HR policies and practices will be made under current regulations and procedures until final regulations are published. Final regulations are expected to be published in 2004, after completion of the review of public comments and a legally-mandated period of conferring with employee representatives.

We're committed to continuing the collaborative environment that has been such an important part of this process. We encourage you to talk to your peers and managers about the proposed HR system. Please continue to share your thoughts, ideas, solutions, and concerns during team and employee meetings. Your continued input on developing a Human Resources system that meets the Department's mission requirements and responds to employee needs is much appreciated.

Several inquiries related to the following question have been received; answer follows:

Q: The Homeland Security Act stated that no changes will be made to employees' employment status, pay, or benefits for one year. March 1 marks the one-year anniversary of the Department. What happens then?

A: March 1 marks the one-year anniversary of the DHS and is an opportunity to celebrate our collective achievements. No changes in employees' employment status, pay, or benefits will be made as a result of the anniversary. The timing of the Department's one-year anniversary and the publication of proposed regulations for our new HR system is coincidental, and we'd like to reassure employees of the following:

- No jobs will be eliminated either as a result of the transition to the new HR system or because of the passing of the one-year anniversary.
- There will be no reduction in current pay or benefits for employees either as a result of the transition to the new system or because of the passing of the one-year anniversary.
- Employees will continue to be covered under current rules and regulations until the new HR system is completed later this year.

Please continue to send your questions and comments regarding the new HR system to hrdesign@dhs.gov. If you would like your comments to be included in the public docket for the rulemaking, be sure to submit them to the addresses listed in the Federal Register notice and above. Comments from hrdesign@dhs.gov will not automatically be sent to the docket.

Prior to the publication of the proposed rules in the Federal Register, Secretary Ridge met with John Gage, President of the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), Colleen Kelley, President of the National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU), and Mike Randall, President of the National Association of Agriculture Employees (NAAE). Secretary Ridge invited them to prepare a joint statement to their membership on the occasion of the publication of the proposed regulations. Here is that message:

February 17, 2004

Message From AFGE/NTEU/NAAE

While there is no agreement with the proposed regulations for a new personnel system, we are committed to continuing discussions with Secretary Ridge. We want to assure you that this is not the end of the process. A formal 30-day comment period begins now during which we will continue to engage with the Secretary. Following that, there will be a more formalized process, which can include mediation between us and the department. Secretary Ridge has committed that substantive discussions will continue. We will aggressively represent your interests with Secretary Ridge. It is our intent to have a new system implemented that is good for the mission and is good for the employees.

II. Protected Critical Infrastructure Information Program Established To Receive, Protect, and Share Vital Information

Private companies are encouraged to share information to enhance homeland security

Homeland Security's newest initiative, the Protected Critical Infrastructure Information (PCII) Program, supports protection of our Nation's critical infrastructure by ensuring that qualified critical infrastructure information submitted by the private sector and others will not be made public under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Under provisions of the Critical Infrastructure Information Act of 2002 (CII Act), information that is voluntarily submitted per those provisions and certified for acceptance will be exempt from public disclosure.

The PCII Program Office is part of Homeland Security's Information Analysis and Infrastructure Protection (IAIP) Directorate and is charged with receiving submissions, determining if the information qualifies for protection and, if validated, sharing it with authorized entities for use as specified in the CII Act.

Initially, the PCII Program Office will limit the sharing of PCII to IAIP analysts. Training is currently underway to certify analysts to handle and safeguard PCII. In the future, the Program Office will expand training programs for access to PCII by federal agencies, and state and local entities that have entered into a Memorandum of Agreement with Homeland Security.

For more information about the PCII Program, please visit the PCII Program Office website on dhs.gov.

III. ICE Agents Arrest 'Sex Traveler' Pedophile

A Baltimore man with three previous convictions for child molestation in Maryland was arrested by ICE agents February 19 on charges that he engaged in multiple offenses involving the sexual molestation of minor teenage boys in the Philippines and Cambodia.

ICE agents arrested Richard Arthur Schmidt, 61, after his arrival at Dulles International Airport following his deportation from Cambodia. On Feb. 5, a federal grand jury charged Schmidt in a 10-count indictment with numerous offenses relating to the sexual exploitation of minor boys in the Philippines and Cambodia. The indictment charges Schmidt with numerous violations of a new federal law that makes it a crime for U.S. citizens to engage in illicit sexual conduct with minors beyond the territorial limits of the United States.

Schmidt, a U.S. citizen on parole in Maryland, has been convicted in Maryland state courts of crimes relating to the sexual molestation of minor teenage boys on three previous occasions. Most recently, Schmidt was sentenced in 1987 to serve an 18-year prison sentence for multiple sex offense convictions, all of which stemmed from Schmidt's sexual involvement with local Maryland boys. In 2000, Schmidt was released on parole by Maryland authorities after serving 13 years of his 18-year sentence.

In May 2002, Maryland authorities issued an arrest warrant for Schmidt after receiving allegations Schmidt had sexually molested a Baltimore boy. Schmidt promptly left Maryland and flew to the Philippines, arriving there in the first week of June 2002.

In December 2003, an ICE agent based in Bangkok, Thailand, discovered that Schmidt was arrested and charged in both the Philippines and in Cambodia with offenses relating to the sexual molestation of young boys in both countries. Schmidt had been given bail when first charged in Cambodia with sexually molesting two boys. A few days later he was arrested again after being charged by the Cambodian National Police with sexually assaulting a third Cambodian boy.

IV. CBP Border Patrol Discovers Undocumented Aliens Being Held Against Their Will

Border Patrol agents assigned to the Temecula, Calif., station received a report from the Riverside County Sheriff's Office (RCSO) stating that a confidential informant had information regarding undocumented aliens from Guatemala and El Salvador being held against their will at a house in Perris, Calif.

The house was reported to have bars and sheets covering the windows. The informant called the RCSO a second time stating those six aliens had escaped during the night, and three of the smugglers were searching for them. It was also reported that anyone who tried to escape was restrained.

Agents from the Temecula Border Patrol Station responded to the scene. Three suspect vehicles left the residence and were under surveillance by a Riverside County Sheriff's helicopter. Marked Riverside County Sheriff's ground units later stopped the principal smugglers and detained them at their vehicles. Border Patrol agents and RCSO deputies entered the residence and discovered sixty-four undocumented aliens from Ecuador, Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Mexico. All of the aliens were transported to the Temecula Station and processed. RCSO detained the three smugglers and are pursuing State charges for kidnapping and related charges. Four vehicles and \$1,900 in cash were seized.

V. Collins, Aguirre Recognize Migrant Interdiction Team

During a Department of Homeland Security briefing at Coast Guard Group Key West, Fla., on Feb. 11, Admiral Thomas H. Collins, Commandant of the U. S. Coast Guard, presented the Coast

Guard Meritorious Team Commendation Award to members of the DHS Alien Migrant Interdiction Operations (AMIO) Team in the Florida Keys.

The Department's AMIO Team, consisting of personnel from Immigration and Customs Enforcement, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Customs and Border Protection, and the Coast Guard, were recognized for their successful interdiction and processing of 142 Cuban migrants from four go-fast smuggling vessels, one Cuban fishing vessel, and a converted 1959 Buick in the Florida Keys over the past several months.

"The complexity of these cases demanded the highest degree of coordination and is a prime example of the integrated Department of Homeland Security operations that occur everyday in the Florida Keys," said Collins.

During his remarks on behalf of USCIS, Director Eduardo Aguirre also expressed his appreciation for the support and success of the inter-agency DHS task force. "We say 'One Team, One Fight' and nothing really exemplifies that anymore than what I see here today. It is a privilege and an honor and I want to thank all of you," he said.

Collins also relayed words of support from Washington: "I had the chance to attend a meeting in the Cabinet Room of the President and Condoleezza Rice about a week and a half ago. [U.S. Southern Command] was talking about things happening in the Caribbean and what they were doing and the President stepped in and said 'That's the Coast Guard and the DHS team working those issues with Haiti and Cuba?' To which Rice responded, 'They're doing incredible things in a difficult situation.'"

VI. DHS Pledges Over \$185 Million To Help Atlanta and Phoenix Airports Meet Security Demands

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) on Feb. 18 signed "Letters of Intent," also known as LOIs, with two airport authorities to help defray the costs of installing permanent explosives detection systems integrated with the airports' checked baggage conveyor systems.

This third round of agreements projects Federal funding of \$93.75 million for Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport and \$91.5 million for Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport. These funds, along with agreements signed this past summer for Seattle-Tacoma, Dallas/Fort Worth, Logan (Boston), Denver, McCarran (Las Vegas), Los Angeles, and Ontario (California) International Airports bring the total amount of projected funding to more than \$955 million.

TSA Acting Administrator David M. Stone has pledged to continue the agency's commitment to assist airports with capital improvements resulting from Federal security mandates. Stone said the agreements "will give airports the resources they need to meet the security challenges they face in the post-September 11th world." The LOIs are the result of agreements negotiated between airports and TSA that provide an intent to reimburse airports a portion of the cost of capital improvements required to meet Congressional security mandates. As part of these agreements, TSA's share is expected to be 75 percent of permitted costs over a three-to four-year period while airports agree to cover the remaining portion of those costs.

Permitted capital improvement costs include preliminary site preparations, structural reinforcement to support new equipment, electrical work, heating, air conditioning, and other

environmental improvements, as well as conveyor belts, tables, and physical enhancements necessary to operate an in-line baggage screening system.

Said Secretary Ridge, "Full in-line baggage screening is a crucial element in our overall homeland security strategy. The 'Letters of Intent' will speed the process of installing this critical security equipment at these airports."

A memorandum of agreement accompanies each LOI and binds airports to programmatic, technical, and cost targets.

VII. USCIS Holds Successful Community Outreach Forums

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services held outreach forums in the Houston and Los Angeles areas to assist the community with the naturalization process. In Houston, USCIS officers provided status checks, forms, and information on immigration benefits to over 100 individuals and their families. The officers were able to identify and resolve a large number of problematic cases. More than 600 students and community members also showed up for a naturalization outreach event in Huntington Park, Calif. At least 200 people received direct one-to-one contact about the naturalization process. These types of events, which are coordinated by USCIS district office staff, help to reduce the number of visitors to the district office and exemplify outstanding customer service.

VIII. Special Report Underscores Link Between Alcohol Abuse and Fatalities from House Fires

It's not just drinking and driving that can be deadly. A new FEMA special report is showing that drinking can also increase your risk of dying in a house fire.

"This important issue of our Topical Fire Research Series underscores an often overlooked connection between alcohol abuse and fire injuries and death," said Michael D. Brown, Under Secretary for Emergency Preparedness and Response. "We hope this report helps educate fire officials and the public about this problem so that campaigns that have been so successful in warning about drinking and driving can bring similar attention to drinking and fires."

According to the report, "Establishing a Relationship Between Alcohol and Casualties of Fire," developed by the National Fire Data Center, part of FEMA's U.S. Fire Administration, up to 40 percent of residential fire death victims are alcohol impaired. In addition, nearly half of adult emergency room patients treated for trauma are alcohol impaired, and burn victims with high blood alcohol levels are more likely to die from their injuries than victims with no alcohol impairment.

"This report also makes an important note that smoking combined with alcohol abuse exacerbates the risk of fires, fire injuries, and fire deaths," said U.S. Fire Administrator R. David Paulison. "Smoking and drinking is a particularly dangerous combination since smoking materials offer a ready-made fire threat and alcohol consumption decreases one's chances of detecting and escaping a fire."

Two related case studies are also being released, further exploring the connection between alcohol abuse and fire deaths. One case study reviewed fire data for Minnesota, which collects alcohol use data as part of its ongoing injury surveillance system. In Minnesota, from 1996 to

2002, 36 percent of the state's fire fatalities had alcohol levels of 0.1 or higher. The second case study looked at data collected by the Ontario, Canada, fire marshal. According to that case study, 19 percent of fire fatalities from 1995 to 2001 were alcohol impaired.

A copy of the full report can be downloaded from: <http://www.usfa.fema.gov/inside-usfa/nfdc/pubs/tfrs.shtm>.

IX. San Diego Coast Guard Cutter Patrols Bering Sea During Dangerous Fishery Season

San Diego-based Coast Guard Cutter Hamilton recently patrolled the icy Bering Sea to provide safety for more than one hundred crab boats during America's most dangerous fishery season, in the roughest weather of the year.

Blinding snowstorms and icing were common. "At first, the cold didn't seem that bad, but then the winds picked up and I experienced some of the harshest weather I had ever seen," said Seaman Ryan Andersen.

"The unprecedented effort with the Alaskan State Troopers makes our patrolling that much more effective," said Captain David Glenn, commanding officer of the cutter Hamilton. "The Coast Guard's Homeland Security Role is broad and varied. Last patrol, we protected Americans from illegal drug smuggling, and this patrol we protected American fishermen as the search and rescue standby cutter. The hazards of setting and retrieving crab pots weighing several hundred pounds in heavy seas with high winds and below freezing temperatures are tremendous."

X. DHS Gears Up For One-Year Anniversary

March 1, 2004, marks the one-year anniversary of the date when the majority of employees transferred into the new Department of Homeland Security.

This coming week, leaders from headquarters and component agencies will host a variety of recognition events, touting the Department's extraordinary accomplishments and strategic plan. These include public town hall meetings, employee town hall meetings, media availabilities, and other speaking engagements.

Here is a list of the week's events:

Feb. 23 -- Secretary Tom Ridge speaks to 300 DHS stakeholders on the one-year anniversary of the Department at The George Washington University in Washington, D.C. The Secretary's address will be carried live by C-SPAN at 10:00 a.m.

Director of the Secret Service Ralph Basham, Customs and Border Protection Commissioner Robert Bonner, and Assistant Secretary for Immigration and Customs Enforcement Mike Garcia sign a memorandum of understanding at the new Federal Air Marshall headquarters in Herndon, Va.

Assistant Secretary Robert Liscouski speaks to the Overseas Security Advisory Council in San Francisco, Calif.

Feb. 24 — Secretary Ridge and Deputy Secretary James Loy address DHS SES personnel at a Leadership Conference in Washington, D.C.

Secretary Ridge participates in a town hall meeting for citizens at George Mason University, joined by Mayor Anthony Williams and several other key policymakers in the National Capital Region. The town hall will air on WETA, in Washington, at 8:00 p.m.

Under Secretary for Emergency Preparedness and Response Mike Brown conducts an employee town hall in Denver, Colo.

Feb. 25-- Under Secretary for Border and Transportation Security Asa Hutchinson testifies before the Senate Appropriations Committee in Washington, D.C.

Under Secretary for Science and Technology Charles McQueary testifies before the House Homeland Security Select Subcommittee in Washington, D.C.

Feb. 26 -- Secretary Ridge speaks to DHS employees and stakeholders at the Port of New Orleans in New Orleans, La, and hosts an employee town hall.

Under Secretary Hutchinson participates in a “One Face at the Border” event in San Diego, Calif., and hosts an employee town hall.

Under Secretary Brown testifies before the Senate Appropriations Committee in Washington, D.C.

Under Secretary McQueary and Under Secretary Brown make a Fire Safety Standards announcement at a Capitol Hill fire station in Washington, D.C.

Feb. 27 – Secretary Ridge speaks to the Detroit Economic Club in Detroit, Mich., and hosts an employee town hall.

Deputy Secretary James Loy speaks about first responder leadership in Milwaukee, Wis., and hosts an employee town hall.

Director of Citizenship and Immigration Services Eduardo Aguirre attends a military naturalization ceremony in Ft. Benning, Ga., and hosts an employee town hall.

Commissioner Bonner hosts an employee town hall in New York, NY.

THREAT LEVEL: YELLOW