

**Nashville District**  
**Human Resources Newsletter**  
**"News You Can Use"**  
Issue 15-09-02  
1 October 2002

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@lrn02.usace.army.mil](mailto:John.G.Restey@lrn02.usace.army.mil).

## Upcoming Key Dates in HR

- **1 July-31 December 2002-----Long Term Care Open Season**
- **15 October-31 December 2002----TSP Open Season**
- **1 October-30 September 2002----GS/GM-13 to GS/GM-15 Appraisals completed appraisals due NLT to HR by the 15 November 2002**
- **1 November-31 October 2002---GS/FWS/WS-1 to GS/FWS/WS-12 Appraisals completed appraisals due NLT to HR by the 16 December 2002**
- **11 November-9 December 2002---FEHB Open Season**

## General News:

### FirstGov

First stop choice, a government web site geared towards government employees: [http://www.firstgov.gov/Government/Federal\\_Workers.shtml#public](http://www.firstgov.gov/Government/Federal_Workers.shtml#public)

## **Reservist Promotion Opportunity**

When a reservist is listed on a promotion referral for internal vacancy announcements, a selecting official must provide that reservist the same consideration he/she would if the applicant were not a reservist IAW the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act.

This act states:

"The Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA), prohibits discrimination against persons because of their service in the Armed Forces Reserve, the National Guard, or other uniformed services. USERRA prohibits an employer from denying any benefit of employment on the basis of an individual's membership, application for membership, performance of service, application for service, or obligation for service in the uniformed services. USERRA also protects the right of veterans, reservists, National Guard members, and certain other members of the uniformed services to reclaim their civilian employment after being absent due to military service or training.

USERRA authorizes OSC to investigate alleged violations of the act by federal executive agencies, and to prosecute meritorious claims before the Merit Systems Protection Board on behalf of the aggrieved person.

*Ref: 38 U.S.C. § 4301, et. seq."*

## **USACE Announces The Sustained Base Leadership And MGMT Resident Session For FY 03-1**

The SBLM training is part of the Army's core curriculum for leadership training and provides a unique opportunity for civilian team members to obtain graduate level professional development in Army specific subjects geared to the sustaining base. The approximate cost for travel and per diem expenses to attend the resident course is \$8300. It is Army's policy to centrally fund Army employees who are funded by military appropriations selected for SBLM. Civil funded USACE employees selected for this training must be funded by the nominating activity.

The electronic application process is open to accept nominations for the resident FY03-1 session. Interested applicants should access the appropriate SBLM announcement in the FY03 Catalog of Army Civilian Training, Education and Professional Development Opportunities for a description of the course, eligibility requirements and application forms. The cut-off date for application is 1 October 2002. The catalog can be found at: <http://www.cpol.army.mil> under "training". POC at USACE is Jean Neill 256-895-7423 [Jean.M.Neill@hnd01.usace.army.mil](mailto:Jean.M.Neill@hnd01.usace.army.mil)

## Changes To The DoD Priority Placement Program

One of management's greatest challenges continues to be effectively balancing the hiring and releasing of employees as dictated by programmatic and/or monetary changes. One of the greatest protections offered to Federal employers and employees, as a safety net, is the Department of Defense's Priority Placement Program (PPP). The PPP is used as a valuable tool to help minimize organizational and employee disruption that is inevitable during the downsizing and/or reshaping processes.

Some of the most recent changes to the program manual are:

- Chapter 1. General Information. Activities/**installations are not authorized** to offer PPP registration as **part of the settlement agreement** when negotiating the settlement of employee complaints, grievances or appeals.
- Chapter 4. Matching and Filling Positions. **No one representing the gaining organization may contact a registrant without a Care Program Coordinator's approval.** If a registrant initiates contact with the gaining activity, the person contacted should advise the registrant of this restriction and then inform the appropriate CARE Program Coordinator.
- Chapter 8. Automated Stopper and Referral System (ASARS) Procedures. Normally, the SWCPOC **can not issue a referral list** of internal candidates (i.e., a list composed of current permanent DoD employees only) until all PPP resumes are cleared. If the referral list has external candidates (when a referral list is composed of candidates who are not current permanent DoD employees), the SWCPOC can only honor commitments and cancel the PPP requisition when an HRO Representative documents that the job offer has been made. This will require close coordination between selecting officials, CPACs and the SWCPOC. It is vital that job offers be extended quickly following selections from the referral list.

## Planning To Retire Soon? Early Preparation Is Essential

If you are planning to retire during the late 2002 or early 2003 timeframe, this information is for you! The ABC-C strongly suggests that you initiate your retirement process by submitting your application within 120 days in advance of your retirement date. Retirement is not an "electronic" process - you must complete a retirement package and mail to the ABC-C. To help ensure a smooth transition into retirement, just follow the steps below:

- **Within a year of your retirement, you should obtain an annuity estimate or a Personal Statement of Benefits.** You may accomplish this by going to: <https://www.abc.army.mil> or by calling the ABC-C. Also, if you have not already paid your Post-56 military deposit, but wish to do so before you retire, you should initiate the process at this time.

**NOTE:** If you have service under the following categories, please contact a counselor concerning your annuity estimate: present/past part-time work schedule, NAF service, elected to transfer to FERS, taken a refund of retirement contributions for a past period of service, have not paid a deposit for Post-56 military or have not made a deposit for a period of no deduction service(temporary service).

- ü About five months in advance of your retirement, you will need to learn more about the retirement process. Visit the ABC-C web site and check out the ABC-C's Retirement Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and the Retirement General Information. (You may also obtain this information from the ABC-C Fax Back system, see below).
- ü Next, you will need to obtain and complete your retirement application. Go to: <https://www.abc.army.mil/Information/ABCRetirement/Forms/Forms.asp>. You may also obtain these forms from the ABC-C Fax Back option. Select option number (6) from the main menu of the ABC-C phone system. Then, select the option to request an index of available documents. You can review the list and have retirement forms, fact sheets and general information documents faxed to you.
- ü You will need to make a few decisions when completing your retirement application. First, if you are eligible, and wish to carry your Federal Employees Group Life Insurance (FEGLI) into retirement, you will need to make an election concerning the amount of coverage you wish to carry past age 65 for your Basic Life, and Option B and Option C (if applicable). To learn more about carrying FEGLI into retirement, check out the FEGLI handbook at the following link: <http://www.opm.gov/insure/life/handbook/Annuits3.htm#procedures%20for%200retiring%20employees>

You will also need to make a decision concerning a survivor annuity election for your current and/or former spouse. If you are currently married and do not wish to elect the maximum survivor benefit, your spouse must consent to your election of a lesser annuity or no annuity. If you have a former spouse who was awarded a court-ordered survivor benefit, you must make your election *accordingly*

- ü In addition to the ABC-C web site, you can find a wealth of retirement information at [www.opm.gov](http://www.opm.gov). OPM offers retirement publications on various topics - just click below:

- ü If you need to speak with a benefits counselor throughout the retirement process, you may do so by calling the ABC-C at 1-877-276-9287 (toll-free from a touch tone telephone), Monday through Friday, from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. (Central Time).

Within 90-120 days of your retirement, your completed retirement application should be sent to the ABC-C. Please ensure that you have submitted all of the required forms and that each has been properly completed, signed and dated. Once your application has been submitted, remind your supervisor to submit the Request for Personnel Action for your retirement as soon as possible

## [Flexible Spending Accounts To Debut Next Year](#)

Federal employees will be able to cut their tax bills next year by putting money aside for medical services and childcare in special tax-free accounts, the Office of Personnel Management announced Tuesday. Employees will be allowed to put up to \$3,000 in the flexible spending accounts for medical expenses, such as co-payments and deductibles, dental care and vision care (including laser eye surgery). They will be able to put up to \$5,000 in the accounts for childcare and elder care. This month, OPM will start seeking out a contractor to run the accounts. Officials expect to run an open season beginning in May, during which employees will be able to sign up for accounts. The accounts would become active in July. Under the flexible spending account program, employees would set aside money from each paycheck to go into the accounts. The money would be deducted before taxes are taken out, much the way Thrift Savings Plan contributions and health insurance premiums are deducted. The pre-tax deductions reduce employees' tax bills. Employees could then withdraw money from the accounts to pay for expenses covered by the program. **Any money not used by the end of the calendar year would be forfeited.** OPM is creating the new benefit in part to keep up with private sector companies. **TAKEN FROM FEDEXEC.COM BY Brian Friel**

## [It's Never Too Early To Plan Free Retirement And Financial Planning Website For Federal Civilian Employees And Military Members](#)

Sign up now for this free web site called the "Retirement & Financial Planning Report". This web site is published by FED week, A 100% Veteran-Owned Business, Publisher, Don Mace and VP of Marketing/Operations, Kevin Couch. Everyone will benefit from subscribing to Retirement & Financial Planning Report. Everyone is eligible to sign up

for FREE weekly email delivery at home, work or both places by visiting their website at:  
[http://www.fedweek.com./](http://www.fedweek.com/)

## **Individual Training Plans(IDP'S) USACE ER-350-1-420, Dated 15 Jan 1995**

IDP's are a critical part of an employee's road map to success. All managers and employees should take the opportunity to read through the USACE ER regarding this important program. The regulation provides policy requirements and guidance concerning the USACE Five-Year Individual Development Plan (IDP) and all USACE developmental assignments.

<http://www.usace.army.mil/inet/usace-docs/eng-regs/er350-1-420/entire.pdf>

## **Health And Benefits:**

### **Health Insurance Premiums To Rise 11%**

Federal employees' health insurance premiums will raise an average of 11.1 % in 2003, the Office of Personnel Management announced. Government workers with self-only insurance coverage will pay an average of \$4.45 more per pay period, or \$116 a year. Workers with family coverage will pay an average of \$10.21 more per pay period, or \$265 a year. The premium hike for 2003 is the third consecutive annual increase above 10 %, but OPM Director Kay Coles James said the increase in the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program is one of the lowest in the nation. The rising cost of prescription drugs, greater use of medical services, the cost of advanced technology and an aging workforce contributed to the increase. . OPM will post the 2003 premium rates on its Web site at [www.opm.gov/insure/health](http://www.opm.gov/insure/health)  
<<http://www.opm.gov/insure/health/index.htm>>. **TAKEN FROM FEDEXEC.COM BY Brian Friel**

### **2003 Federal Employee Health Benefits Rates Available**

OPM has announced the 2003 rates for Federal Employee Health Benefit Program plans at <http://www.opm.gov/insure/health/03rates/toc-np.asp>

Overall, the average employee cost increases by 10.5% for the fee-for-service plans and 13% for HMO plans. OPM's news release is available at <http://www.opm.gov/pressrel/2002/MO-FEHB.asp>

The plan brochures are NOT yet available - as soon as they are you will be notified.

## **Key Bills Effecting Federal Employees**

There are many legislative bills effecting federal employees on the debate table. To track the progress of these bills go to:

<http://capwiz.com/govexec/issues/bills/>. Some of these bills include: **H.R. 866** - [Delinquent child support payments </govexec/issues/bills/?bill=37888>](#) 2 (2 R) **H.R. 555** - [Access to child care </govexec/issues/bills/?bill=10029>](#) 37 (6 R, 1 I, 30 D) **H.R. 251** - [Federal Employees Child Care Act </govexec/issues/bills/?bill=8365>](#) 6 (3 R, 3 D) **S. 1982** - [Lower federal health insurance premiums </govexec/issues/bills/?bill=121353>](#) 2 (2 D) **H.R. 3915** - [Paid Parental Leave Act </govexec/issues/bills/?bill=121351>](#) 46 (2 R, 1 I, 43 D).

## ***Food for Thought***

**" If life was fair, Elvis would be alive and all the impersonators would be dead."**

Johnny Carson