



NEWS FROM THE CO-CHAIRS

By Sherri Buxton, MWA Office, Peoria, IL, and Melissa Stiefel, E. Lansing, MI
The PASTG is hard at work putting the finishing touches on our upcoming meeting, "Discover Tools to Build a Better You." This three-day conference has been designed with you in mind. Our planned general and break-out sessions cover a wide range of topics that have a direct impact on our roles as office professionals. We hope this conference will enhance your professional skills and serve as a catalyst for developing networking partners throughout the Area.

The website to the conference is now available and ready for registration. You can access this information through this URL:
<http://www.mwa.ars.usda.gov/mwa/pastg/news/news.htm>

We request that you register no later than September 3, 2004. We look forward to seeing you in St. Louis, Missouri!

MWA SECRETARY OF THE YEAR Marsha Ebener

Marsha Ebener of the Fermentation Biochemistry Research Laboratory located at the National Center for Agricultural Research in Peoria, Illinois, has been selected as the 2003 MWA Secretary of the Year. Marsha will be recognized at the Office Professional's

Meeting for her outstanding service to ARS and the MWA. You may pass along your personal congratulations to Marsha at: ebenermm@ncaur.usda.gov

CHANGING FACES

Ann Komo

Ann Komo is the new Office Automation Assistant at Cropping Systems and Water Quality Unit in Columbia, MO. Prior to joining ARS Ann worked for the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for 5 years. Ann spent three years in the United States Navy as an airman stationed at Naval Air Station in Norfolk, VA. Ann enjoys spending time with her husband and four girls, camping, boating and being a Girl Scout assistant leader.

WHY I KEEP

P&P 253.4 HANDY AT ALL TIMES!

By Paula Snell, MWA IT Specialist

We all wonder at times "*Can I go to XYZ website?*" or "*Can I get email from my mother?*" or "*Can I use my PC to type up a homework assignment?*"

According to **Policy and Procedure (P&P) 253.4**, "IT resources may only be used for authorized purposes."

However, according to Departmental Regulation (DR) 3300-1, dated March 23, 1999, "limited personal use of Government office equipment by employees during personal time is considered to be an 'authorized use' of Government property". In ARS (and other REE agencies), "limited personal use" "involves minimal additional expense to the Government, is performed on the employee's personal

time, and does not interfere with the mission or operations of the agency.”

P&P 253.4 addresses Acceptable Personal Use as well as Unacceptable Personal Use and how it pertains to telephone, email, Internet, Fax, Copier, and Printer use.

Acceptable use includes the use of the above services *IF* the use does *NOT* interfere with official business, involves minimal expense, and is on the employee’s personal time (before duty hours, during lunch, or after duty hours). It also is limited to situations where the equipment or service already exists.

Unacceptable use would include any use that:

- Generates additional expense.
- Causes congestion, delay or disruption of a service, i.e., forwarding “chain” email messages, downloading video clips, sound, or large files that could, potentially, degrade the network’s performance.
- Is offensive to the public or be illegal activities, including pornography, hate speech, or material that ridicules others.
- Is for commercial purposes or “for-profit” activities such as outside employment or to support a private business endeavor.
- Engages in any outside fund-raising activity, endorsing a product or service, or participating in lobbying activity or prohibited partisan political activity.

Now, you may ask “how does this affect me and my use of the Internet?” Prior to using the Internet, get your supervisor’s

approval to use these services as they have “management authority and responsibility to ensure appropriate use of resources within their organizations.”

Make your supervisor aware that you may be working on your homework during lunch or before or after work. Also, let them know that your mother may send you an occasional email (and, take the responsibility to make sure that it *IS* occasional, and that Mom understands the rules, also!)

For your own protection, make sure you do NOT use the internet for:

- Viewing or downloading sexually explicit material.
- Viewing or downloading materials related to gambling, weapons, terrorist activities, or any other illegal activities.
- Posting agency information to external news groups, etc., without prior approval.
- Unauthorized acquisition or use of computer software or other materials protected by copyright laws, trademarks, etc., including music or videos.
- Participating in chat rooms or on-line, real-time chat software such as AOL Instant Messenger, MSN Messenger, etc.
- Using web browser add-on features to listen to radio broadcasts or music for entertainment that may overburden the telecommunications system.

Finally, for more detailed information, please take the time to read P&P 253.4.

TIPS & TRICKS

By Sandy Groneberg, Morris, MN

1) Have you had trouble getting items returned to you, when you have to give them to someone for signature or review? In our office, we use colored folders that are clearly labeled "Return to *Secretary's name*". I use red folders and the Office Automation Assistant uses green folders, so everyone immediately knows to whom the folders should be returned. If you really have a problem with this, get pink folders. Men will return pink folders very quickly!

2) Do you have trouble remembering? Many e-mail programs have the capacity to type in a message now to be delivered at a future date. If I want to be sure to remember something on a future date, I send myself an email reminder with a future delivery date pertinent to the deadline, and then I can forget about it until I read my email. (Be sure to date the message early enough so that you have time to actually accomplish whatever needs to be done!)

3) How to keep track of dates: Our lab set up a calendar on an "intranet" site that may be accessed by all employees. I keep it up to date with meetings, seminars, travel schedules, leave schedules and deadlines that must be met for reports, awards, etc. Employees can put an icon on their desktop to easily access the calendar. This is one way of ensuring everyone knows what is happening at your lab. (This relieves you of answering repeated questions about "When is....?")

4) How to assist your supervisor with mail: When your supervisor is away from the office, you can make his/her return to the office less stressful by the

way you handle the incoming mail.

Here are some tips:

- Date stamp all mail with the incoming date, but also *scan the item for any action deadlines or RSVP dates*. If the item requires action, I put it in the "Urgent" file, with the closest action deadline item on top, working down to later deadlines. Your supervisor will know that he/she needs to deal with this information first upon return to the office. It is far less stressful to deal with a small folder of items than to have to go through a stack of mail.
- Mail that doesn't require action, but is job-related can go in a "Routine" file, and mail that is of lowest priority can go into a "Future Reading" file. Again, I would organize each file from highest priority to lowest priority. These files can then be read by the supervisor at his or her leisure, having full confidence that they haven't missed any urgent deadlines.

5) If you are going to take a PowerPoint presentation on the road, the best thing to do is to run the "*Pack-and-Go*" wizard (File/Pack and Go). This will bring along fonts and linked files necessary for the presentation.

- Open the presentation you want to get ready for a different computer.
- Create a new directory somewhere on your C: drive.
- In PowerPoint, choose File/Pack and Go.
- Follow the prompts, giving the newly created directory as the target.

- This will create an executable file which includes the items needed for the presentation. When you run the executable file, it runs the presentation automatically.

REMINDERS

Time & Attendance

Time and Attendance logs should be completed in pen. Those employees who prefer to complete the log in pencil should photocopy their log and give the photocopied sheet to the person who enters the information into STAR. Also, employees should initial next to any changes or white out they've done on their timesheet. These practices are to ensure that all time and attendance information is accurate and that no one except the employee has made changes on their log.

Time-Off Awards

As timekeepers, it is good to remind employees who receive time-off awards that if the time-off award hours are not used in a year, *the time is lost*. Also, if they leave the agency, the awarded time is lost. A time-off award is never converted to cash, nor is the time added to annual leave. The only time they receive money for the hours is when they actually take the time and it is coded in the database.

When an employee receives a time off award, the timekeeper needs to have the LAO access IRIS 143 to be sure the leave has been processed. If the award is in the NFC system, it can be added to STAR. The timekeeper adds the time-off award in the leave account as follows:

- Open STAR.

- Click on Employee Maintenance.
- Highlight the employee's name.
- Click on LA (Leave Account).
- Type in TOFF (you can not pick it from the pull down menu).
- Type in the number hours for the award in the FORWARD area.
- Click on ADD.
- Close the door.
- Click on bi-weekly and complete the T&A in the usual manner.

Once the award has been added into the leave account in STAR, the employee can use the time by coding it as 61 prefix and 66 TC. It will show time off used. Make sure the week adds up correctly and then verify.

IMPORTANT: If the employee tries to use the hours before it they are entered into the system, NFC will take the hours out of their annual leave balance or any other available balance if annual leave is depleted. The "*time-off*" balance shows on the STAR print-out, so the timekeeper and award winner can tell at a glance if there is additional time to be used from an award.

Foreign Research Associates

Visiting Foreign Scientists must have Area approval prior to the visit. Please use the following procedures:

- Send an E-mail to the Area Director's Office via proper channels to request to become involved with a Foreign Research Associate. Include the details of the proposed, work, time frame, sponsorship, funding, etc.
- The Area Director's Office will reply to the requestor, indicating approval or denial.
- Upon receipt of approval from Area Director's Office,

- IMMEDIATELY* have the non-citizen complete the ARS-230, Non-Citizen Data Sheet.
- Forward via proper channels, the completed ARS-230, Non-Citizen Data Sheet, to Marie Bishop at bishopm@mwa.ars.usda.gov or fax 309-681-6683.
 - Marie Bishop will forward the completed ARS-230 to the ARS Office of Homeland Security and request a name trace.
- Frequently review any ARS-230 to update to reflect any changes.

REE Directory Updates

Do you have a new employee in your unit? Has your RL retired? If so, then you need to update your Unit Details in the REE Directory. Any change in your unit's roster information (new phone number, new title, new employee, retired employee, etc.) should prompt you to update the information.

To make changes in the REE Directory, access the system at [http://isbprod.ars.usda.gov/dir2/viewemp\\$.startup](http://isbprod.ars.usda.gov/dir2/viewemp$.startup) Then click on the menu option "Update for Authorized Personnel Only" and enter your user name and password when prompted. Then you may search for the appropriate employee to update.

If you need a copy of the "Guide to Updating the Directory", please send your request to Missy Stiefel at stiefelm@msu.edu.

CALENDAR

September

- Annual ethics training takes place in early September.
- Prepare requisition AD-700s for Research Support Agreements

- (RSAs). Update related documentation.
- Prepare Blanket Travel Authorizations for next fiscal year.
- Prepare new files for travel vouchers and other fiscal year filing.
- Update investigator/SY time on projects in ARIS.
- Inquire with your scientists if any of them are preparing NRI grants.

October

- Update mission statement in ARIS.
- Make sure all Category 5/7/8/9 employees have had mid-year performance reviews completed.
- Fall Cleanup of 425s only.

November

- Funded post-docs announced.
- Print out Detail by Author reports to update publications.

HELPFUL HINTS

Online Dictionary

Here's an online dictionary web site that may be of interest: www.OneLook.com. OneLook.com functions as a search engine offering users a means of finding word definitions from many different dictionaries at the same time. Just type in the word you are looking for and you'll get a listing from different dictionaries.