
Office of Crisis Planning and Management
Personnel Security Division

USDA Personnel Security Newsletter

Some Thoughts on Personnel Security

I am often asked: What is a personnel security program? A personnel security program determines if applicants and employees are reliable, trustworthy, and of “unswerving loyalty” to the United States. A related aspect of personnel security is applicant and employee “suitability.” Suitability determinations establish whether an individual’s character and conduct is such that it would not adversely impact the integrity or efficiency of the federal service. Personnel security and suitability processes measure human reliability.

The personnel security and suitability process begins when an applicant or employee completes the required personnel security forms. These documents form the basis for background checks. Background checks typically involve certain record reviews and letters of inquiry to former employers, educational institutions, and references. For public trust and national security positions, a background investigation includes an interview with an investigator and interviews of supervisors, coworkers, references, neighbors, and other associates of the applicant or employee.

Future articles will explain how security and suitability determinations are made, the standards used, and related matters.

Marty Brumback

Director
Personnel Security Division

Marty Brumback Named Personnel Security Division Director

Marty Brumback, our new Personnel Security Division Director, has finally reported for duty on March 13, 2002. Marty comes to us with 26 years of human resource management experience within USDA, most recently in the Agricultural Research Service. Marty has some excellent ideas for improving the personnel security. In the coming months, Marty will begin implementing some of these improvements

Presently, the Personnel Security Division consists of:

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Division Director
Marty Brumback

Personnel Security Specialists
John Sharkey
Kimberly Lew (departing June 14, 2002)
Carl Johns *contractor*
Louise Borden *contractor*
Anthony Balbosa *contractor*
Carrie Moore *contractor*
Janice Giles *contractor*

Administrative Support
Lucy Lew
Carolyn Robertson *contractor*

Got comments or suggestions for future articles? Please contact Marty Brumback at (202) 720-7373 or Martin.Brumback@usda.gov

OCPM Meets Personnel Security Performance Goal

Departments and Agencies throughout the federal government have set a performance goal of adjudicating closed personnel security cases within 30 days of receipt. It is hard to believe, but USDA not only meets, but also now exceeds, this performance goal. OCPM is now adjudicating cases within 30 days of the date the investigation was closed, including time it takes for the cases to ship by OPM. Prior to the events of September 11, 2001, OCPM had hoped to cut the time to adjudicate cases down to around 120 days, so this is truly an achievement. Much of this success is owed to the members of the Personnel Security Action Team (*see photo below*) who were instrumental in helping us eliminate the case backlog.

Department Regulation Issued on Denial of Clearance

In February 2002, Department Regulation 4600-2 entitled *Procedures for Denial or Revocation for Access to National Security Information* was issued. The regulation lays out the process to be used in USDA to provide a final level of administrative appeal for persons whose security clearance has been denied or revoked. A copy of [Departmental Regulation 4600-2](#) can be found on the USDA intranet site.

Personnel Security Web Site Continues to Offer Useful Information

The USDA personnel security web site (www.usda.gov/da/ocpm/classtest.htm) provides information on our personnel security program, Adobe Acrobat Reader versions of personnel security forms, and tips on how to properly complete required forms. Comments and suggestions on further improving the web site are welcome.



Photo of Lou Gallegos, Assistant Secretary for Administration, with PSAT Team.
Top row l-r: John Sharkey (DA) ♦ De'Borah A. Applegate ♦ Pete Sepe (Forest Service)
♦ Jo Farrell (RD) ♦ Marty Brumback (ARS). Middle row l-r: Kimberly Lew (DA) ♦
Sharon Friend *Team Leader* (OIG) ♦ Akiko Ward (OIG) (FSIS) ♦ Sheila Bruce (FSA)
Bottom row l-r: ♦ Linda Raver (FAS) ♦ Sue Bernstein (APHIS) ♦ Lou Gallegos (DA) ♦
Juanita Makuta (FNS). Not shown: Dan Loreda (OCIO)

OPM Continues Move Towards E-Security

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) is working on rolling out e-security initiatives that should soon make it easier for employees to access personnel security services. OCPM is working closely with the National Finance Center and OPM on an initiative to supply security information on USDA employees to an OPM operated central data warehouse. Once this data warehouse is operational, there will no longer be a need to “pass a clearance” to attend a classified meeting. Each federal department security office will have access to the database and will be able to determine the status of each person’s clearance.

Another significant effort is anticipated to culminate this summer with the release of the online version of the Standard Form (SF)-86, *Questionnaire for National Security Positions*. As we learn more about this initiative, we will share this information with the Personnel Security POCs.

USDA Agencies Now Have Access to the Personnel Security Database

OCPM has recently authorized access to the Personnel Security Action Tracking Database to the primary and secondary personnel security points of contact (POC) who were selected by each human resource office. POCs should now be working with their respective information technology servicing offices to establish connectivity to the Department Administration file server where the database resides. Once access is achieved, the POCs will be able to determine the status of any pending personnel security action by accessing the database (see below) thereby eliminating the need to contact OCPM.

As the POCs gain access to the database, OCPM is eliminating answering inquiries from individual applicants and referring them to their respective POCs. Each agency will have to decide to what extent they elect to answer status questions from their employees.

In late April, OCPM also conducted training for POCs on how to use the database. This training can offered in the future on an “as needed basis. Contact Marty Brumback at Martin.Brumback@usda.gov to schedule training.

Accuracy of Personnel Security Data Continues To Improve

OCPM has been working hard to improve the accuracy of our personnel security data. In March, we completed purging our paper files of case of persons who are no longer employed by USDA. These files are being kept in secure storage. We next synched our paper files with the USDA Security Entry Tracking Systems (SETS). This National Finance Center maintained database is the official database for security clearances in USDA. This is the first time in recent memory that the paper files have been synched to SETS. To assist us in the effort, we would appreciate hearing from those who have access to SETS about any inaccuracies or discrepancies that need correction. Once the SETS database is corrected, the data will be forwarded to the Office of Personnel Management for utilization in their E-Security initiative (see article *on OPM Continues Move Towards E-Security*).

OCPM and OPM Team Up To Offer Training

In April, OCPM, in conjunction with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) offered two different training opportunities on personnel security issues to USDA staff. The first was "processing investigation forms" training. This training was well attended and provided instructions on how to correctly fill out the infamous SF-85, SF-85P, and SF-86 forms. Incorrectly completed forms continue to be a significant source of delays in processing personnel security paperwork and this training should speed processing of paperwork.

In late April and again in early May, training on how to properly designate sensitivity of positions was held. Approximately 120 human resource personnel from across USDA attended this training. This training provided much needed information to those in USDA who determine position sensitivity. Incorrect position sensitivity designation continues to delay the processing of personnel security cases.

OPM Begins Offering Preemployment Checks

On March 1, 2002, OCPM and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) put in place an agreement that allows USDA human resource management offices access to select OPM investigative services to conduct preemployment checks. Under this agreement, known as a *Special Agency Check (SAC)*, each USDA human resource management office has access to these services. Several agencies within USDA are now using these OPM investigative services to conduct preemployment checks for both new employees and contractors. While preemployment checks are a useful screening tool to determine whether a new employee or contractor should report for duty, they in no way replace or supplant the

requirement that OPM conduct an employment background investigation on each employee and for each contractor who encumbers a public trust position, and to determine whether each is suitable in accordance with OPM's adjudication regulations.

The two products that seem most useful are the fingerprint check and the credit report. Together these will cost \$33. As an added benefit, some of the costs may be recoverable, if a formal employment background investigation is requested from OPM within 120 days. As with all personnel security services, these costs are borne by the USDA agency requesting the service.

On March 7, 2002, OCPM issued guidance to USDA's human resource management offices outlining the costs and explaining how to access these services. The decision to use or not use preemployment checks remains the discretion of each USDA agency or office. Use of these new services will help ensure a safe and secure workplace for all USDA employees, contractors, and further strengthen our ability to deliver uninterrupted essential services to our customers. Any questions or comments concerning using these services should be referred to Marty Brumback at Marty.Brumback@usda.gov

High Hopes for FY 2003

With the support of the Assistant Secretary for Administration and the Office of the Secretary, OCPM was successfully in obtaining significantly increased funding for our Personnel Security Division in the President's FY 2003. The proposed FY 2003 budget contains new funding that, if approved, will allow for continued improvement in the personnel security program included the much anticipated modernization of the program to embrace upcoming e-security initiatives.