

UPDATE: CHANGE TO TIME-IN-GRADE REQUIREMENT POSTPONED

The new rule to eliminate the 52 – week time-in-grade requirement for promotions has been postponed. The new rule was to be in effect March 9; however, The Office of Personnel Management has postponed it for 60 days. We will update employees as we receive further information.

RETIREMENT PROCESSING

Employees who are thinking of retirement should think about the following information when going into retirement. Most individuals are not aware of the process retirement paperwork goes thru before an individual gets a full annuity check. Below are the steps involved:

1. Employee submits paperwork for retirement.
2. Paperwork is processed, copied and originals sent to Benefits/Payroll in Denver.
3. **After** the employee's official last day, payroll runs necessary reports and forwards retirement package and reports to OPM for processing.
4. Any lump sum annual leave is paid to the retired employee **two full pay periods** after their official last day.
5. OPM sends the retired employee a letter acknowledging that they have received their retirement paperwork and assigns them a claim number.
6. Any Thrift Savings disbursements must be made at least 30 days after the official last day.
7. The retirement package is assigned to a claim's examiner who will review the eligibility and computa-

tion of the retirement annuity.

- a. Note: During this time, which could take up to 6 months, retirees are placed in an interim pay status while awaiting final adjudication. During this time, the retiree will receive between 50% to 75% of the annuity estimate.
8. Once the interim status is complete and the retirement package is complete, OPM will make up any missed payments, however, it does not include interest.
9. Once the employee officially retires, OPM becomes the retiree's servicing personnel office. Any questions or changes must be addressed to OPM. <http://www.opm.gov/retire/>

SKILL SOFT ONLINE LIBRARY OPEN SEASON

A reminder for all employees, DOI University, in an effort to provide employees with innovative training to meet the Department of the Interior's mission goals, is launching an open season for the SkillSoft library of on-line courses. From February 1 – April 30, 2009, DOI employees will have the opportunity to purchase SkillSoft Library access. For a fee of **\$45**, users can gain unlimited access to the SkillSoft library on DOI LEARN for one full year. This is an invaluable resource for a great price.

SkillSoft's library of approximately 2,400 on-line courses covers a wide range of subject matter, including:

- Project management
- Supervisory/leadership skills
- Human resources development
- Budget/financial management
- Acquisition management
- Information technology (IT), including everything from computer programming to Microsoft desktop applications, such as PowerPoint, Access, and Excel.

SkillSoft courses satisfy a number of mandatory training requirements and also support several professional credit programs.



Users can earn college credits, Continuing Educational Units (CEUs), Professional Development Units, Project Management Institute Units (PMIs), Continuing Professional Education units (CPEs), and certifications in areas such as business skills, desktop applications, and IT skills.

Additional information about the SkillSoft Open Season, including instructions on how to register for access on DOI LEARN and an Excel spreadsheet of all SkillSoft courses available, can be found at the following website: www.doi.gov/training.

SPECIAL RETIREMENT SUPPLEMENT

The Special Retirement Supplement (SRS) is a supplement for individuals covered under the FERS retirement system. This supplement is available for retirees who are between their Minimum Retirement Age (MRA) and age 62. The SRS is designed to replace the portion of an age 62 social security benefit that is due to your work under the FERS system. Therefore, if you had social security covered wages at another job prior to your federal service, it will not be replaced in the SRS.

Example: Your MRA is age 57 and you retire at that age with 30 years of federal service. Your age 62 social security benefit is expected to be \$1000. In computing your SRS, your years of federal service are divided by 40 (the number of years social security considers to be a full career), and the resulting fraction (3/4 or 75%) is multiplied by the age 62 social security benefit to give you the amount of your SRS. In this case, your SRS would be \$750.

Retirees will receive the SRS until they reach age 62, at which time the SRS will end. The SRS will end when you become eligible for Social Security Retirement benefits, not when you apply for them. Also, keep in mind that the SRS does not receive a cost of living adjustment and the earnings test that applies to Social Security benefits received before you reach full so-

cial security retirement age apply to SRS. Exceptions to the SRS are:

- Special Category employees (law enforcement, firefighters, etc) may receive the SRS at the time of retirement, even if they are younger than their MRA. They are not subject to the earnings test until they reach their MRA
- Individuals who take voluntary early retirement are not entitled to the SRS until their MRA
- Employees who retire under MRA+10, deferred retirement or disability retirement are not eligible for the SRS

RETIREMENT PLANNING:

According to an article published in the Government Executive, questions are asked from employees regarding benefits afforded to them at retirement. Below are some questions that are asked that information is clarified or corrected.

- Spousal Survivor Annuity – When considering to elect a spousal survivor annuity at retirement or not, consider the following;
 - The reduction to your retirement to provide a survivor annuity reduces your taxable income.
 - Electing a survivor annuity allows your spouse to carry the Federal Health Benefit Insurance if the Federal Annuitant dies.
 - If your spouse dies first, your retirement benefit will be restored to the amount it was before the reduction to pay for the annuity.
- Continuing Health Insurance – When considering continuing Health insurance coverage into retirement, below are some rumors and the corrected information;



- **Rumor: Retirees pay more for health insurance than employees pay** Actually, the government continues to contribute the same amount to the premium for retirees as it does for employees. The only difference is that the premium amount is taken out after taxes, rather than before.
- **Rumor: You must cover your spouse for five years before you retire if you want family coverage in retirement** Actually, you can wait to choose self and family coverage until after retirement. The federal employee is the only individual who needs to carry the coverage five years before retirement. However, you must have self and family coverage on the day you die. The only way a surviving spouse gets coverage if you die first is if he or she is covered on the day of your death and they or another family member also must be entitled to a survivor annuity.
- **Rumor: Two federal employees who are married cannot switch from self and family coverage to two self only plans if they are within five years of retirement** Actually, it might seem like the

spouse who was covered under their spouse's self and family coverage wouldn't have five years of "their own" coverage prior to retirement. But you do not need to be paying for FEHB for five years prior to retirement, you only need to be covered under the program. Some couples make this change because they no longer have children who are qualified to be enrolled in their self and family coverage. Typically, two self only plans are generally less expensive than one self and family enrollment.

TRAINING CALENDAR REMINDERS

IT Security Training - Mandatory

The 2009 Federal Information Systems Security Awareness training IM has been released with a Bureau due date of **May 15th**. The course has been mass-assigned to everyone in DOI Learn. CD ROMS of the course are available by contacting Greg Peterson.

EEO Training

Employees are now required to complete 2 hours of EEO training each year. This requirement can be accomplished by completing the following courses: Discrimination and Whistleblowing in the Workplace (No Fear Act) training and the "Do What's Right" training.

Supervisors are required to complete 4 hours of EEO training each year. This



requirement can be accomplished by completing the following courses: Discrimination and Whistleblowing in the Workplace (No Fear Act) training, the “Do What’s Right” training and either a self study course or a classroom training. EEO will notify supervisors on information regarding the self study and classroom training in the future.

Do What’s Right Training

The **2007 Do What’s Right** with four different sessions on one dvd plus the ala carte on the second dvd (used to put together a customized class) is the current version. Course facilitator must fax the class roster to EEO 208-387-5452 to receive credit. Note: red-carded employees are required to complete the training before they go on a fire/incident assignment.

No Fear Act Training - Mandatory

Discrimination and Whistleblowing in the Workplace (No Fear Act training), the 2009 version is in the Online Course Catalog at DOI Learn. Every DOI employee has to complete the training by September 1, 2009. If an employee recently completed the 2007 version, they will have to also complete the 2009 No Fear Act training. CDROMS of the course will be available thru EEO.

RETIREMENTS

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