

# N.A.A.E.

National Association of Agriculture Employees

## NEWSLETTER



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*This Newsletter is distributed free to NAAE members & to members of the House and Senate Committees*

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## **A Message from Our President**

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*Sarah Rehberg*

Yikes! It's already 2014, time for National Officer elections and time for another celebrated NAAE Convention! Check out the candidate biographies posted on the NAAE home page and vote!

Much has happened since our last Newsletter --the most significant event being the first **government shutdown** in nearly 20 years. Many of us were not present for the prior shutdown, some of us were, and it was a whole different PPQ then. This shutdown, like the last, was not orderly (they NEVER are), it was a confusing mess, and, from what I've heard through the USDA Forum, we did better in PPQ than other agencies, but of course we did worse in some patches than other agencies, too. The up-side is that now that a shutdown has actually happened we will be able to engage PPQ in fixing the "shutdown plan" so it goes better next time, if there is a next time. (We'll keep practicing until they shut us down for good!) While the details and guidance given may be different the next time and each time, at least for the most part we should have a general plan in place that can be fine-tuned and edited rather than crafted from scratch. One of the issues for this year's shutdown stemmed, in our opinion, from the fact that APHIS had the shutdown plan, not PPQ. That's all well and good except that PPQ has unique situations and details that aren't covered by APHIS. Since once again management wasn't allowed to discuss details or even acknowledge a shutdown might happen until the 11<sup>th</sup> hour, there was no time to work out in advance or even anticipate all of the potential issues.

I know we've already gotten explanations from the APHIS Administrator and others about what happened, but just to be extra cautious, here's our (NAAE's) explanation of what happened during the shutdown. "Essential" and "non-essential" are terms of art that should never have been used because they don't apply during a shutdown. The fact that the news media were regularly using them increased the confusion. PPQ had three, maybe in our opinion four, categories of employees: 1) those who were furloughed; 2) those who were excepted because they

performed work that fell into the Anti-Deficiency Act criteria of protection of life and property and who got paid from appropriated funds; (For PPQ that included pre-departure operations in Puerto Rico and Hawaii and insect production facilities. These duties were specified in the APHIS Shutdown Plan and were very clear cut, or so we thought.) 3) those who were exempt because they were paid under a funding source independent of the budget, specifically paid with User Fee and no-year funds; and 4) finally the rest of the people in PPQ who worked.

The criteria for Category Four became the grey area -- we just don't know if those criteria were or will be cleared up. PPQ determined that employees who were paid with 51% or more User Fee funds would work. Some of those people were deemed excepted and some were exempt. Part of the reason for the confusion was caused when PPQ started sending SPHDs the lists of employees working -- there were no instructions or explanations included. As far as we can tell, there was no basis for using or not using the 51% mark. It was purely arbitrary. There just is no real guidance on this, likely because it is a situation unique to PPQ. The same goes for an employee who is 100% independently funded but from different sources, i.e. part user fee, part no-year funds. (No-year funds are exactly what they sound like, appropriate funds that are obligated to a program but not locked into a specific fiscal year budget, they don't expire when the fiscal year ends, they remain available until they're used up.) We also aren't sure how it was decided who worked and who didn't in programs that had no-year funds, like ALB, EAB and fruit fly. There were people in fruit fly who were working because of the no-year funds but were deemed excepted because no one knew how long the furlough would last and the no-year funds might have run out. So the bottom line is, PPQ did the best it could, we were involved and asked questions, and still there were significant issues. So now we must work on fixing it for the future.

Right after the shutdown ended PPQ reached out to NAAE for questions, comments and suggestions for a review of what happened and a plan for addressing it next time -- they're calling it a "hot wash". Below I've included in blue font the comments that we submitted. Before PPQ could really get going on their hot wash, the Department directed all the mission areas to conduct a hot wash. So now that APHIS is nearly done with its review, PPQ is getting back to conducting ours. At this point, we have no results yet, but we know we will be involved and hopefully can fix some of the shortcomings that occurred in October. Let us know what we've missed! We need to be prepared for the next time, just in case.

**NAAE Comments regarding the Partial Government Shutdown  
in October 2013**

(Submitted October 31, 2013)

NAAE would first like to express our gratitude for the opportunity to share our comments, concerns and suggestions regarding the Shutdown and how it may be better handled should a future shutdown occur. We have heard stories of zero communication in other agencies, and recognize that PPQ did put forth sincere effort to communicate with its employees. We can always do better though and NAAE would be pleased to be able to play a part in that, starting by pointing out areas where communications seemed to have been lacking during the recent Shutdown.

There were two main issues and both boil down to lack of communication of information, first about the lists and, then once furloughed employees went home, about how to operate during the Shutdown.

Employee Status/ Lists

We don't understand why it took so long to share the various versions of the lists. The delay was unacceptable as well as incomprehensible especially considering that we had kept the list confidential and that the list had been built in March and just needed updating. We requested to discuss the list and its development well in advance of the Shutdown and it was still at least a week later before PPQ started talking about sharing the list with us. At that point it still took days long after it was supposed to have been shared with us.

What was the basis for using 51% User Fee as a minimum amount to classify an employee as exempt? Was there any guidance that led PPQ to make this decision on the threshold? It seems to us to be an arbitrary decision that was made without guidance from OMB/OPM (and in conflict with what we understood many other agencies and departments were using as their demarcation), and while the result was positive in that so many more employees were able to work, we still question the legitimacy and basis of that decision. And if it was a legitimate decision, why was that never explained to us or other inquiring people? Not once did we see that 51% in writing.

Why were employees working under no-year funds listed as excepted? They weren't performing excepted functions, were they?

There are still so many inconsistencies on the list. If instructions for how to determine the status of an employee had been given to managers before the furlough, then those managers would have been able to report back with informed and consistent responses. Simply telling managers “here’s your list, tell us who isn’t on it, and we’re not taking anyone off it,” is not good enough to produce a rational, fair list.

### Operations during the Shutdown

We saw guidance that stated employees who were exempt because of User Fees could do appropriated work while waiting for intermittent UF activities to develop. That message wasn’t disseminated and should have been.

There should’ve been an email that went out to everyone that let people know who was working and who wasn’t, employees and supervisors/managers alike.

There should’ve been an email that went out to everyone that gave clear instruction on the reporting structure. We understand that if there was no manager locally, employees were supposed to go up a level until they found one working. That was not communicated at all. In fact, many employees may not be aware what the levels are so they could not even attempt to go up the chain even if they had known about this rumored but never disseminated instruction.

For areas and states that had no working manager, often BUEs were designated either point of contact, acting supervisor, etc. Many employees were not prepared for this responsibility and by being provided virtually no support, these employees were left hanging and responsible for the other employees in their area.

There should’ve been an email sent out to the bargaining unit employees that told people where to go with questions, a general number that could then be called to distribute the question to the appropriate person who was working.

We think that as a result of the reorganization into core functional areas there was an even greater separation between us in the field and Riverdale. We had no idea who in Riverdale was working and who wasn’t. Again, the easiest solution would have been to share the list of PPQ employees working. If sharing that list was still an issue, then there

should've been points of contact sent out for each division, area, state, program, etc.

Shutting down the internet sites was a huge issue. We understand the reason behind it but it's not just the public that relies on information found on our websites. Since the intranet didn't go down, there should have been some sort of internal mirror of the external sites that was up to date as of the furlough.

There was no direction from upper management regarding what reports must still be submitted and what shouldn't during the shutdown, i.e. annual safety inspections, chemical inventories, quarterly EEO reports.

### T&A Issues

Loading FY 14 codes into WebTA so late in the year meant a lot of them didn't get loaded in time. Why not start that at the beginning of September every year so it's done in plenty of time in case any issues come up at the end of the fiscal year?

Many didn't know who was supposed to certify their t&a's after their managers were furloughed. Some managers even locked them in the system before going home.

There needed to be clear guidance on how to code t&as. The guidance constantly changed and some heard it and some didn't. Were people supposed to only code UF even if they weren't normally 100%? Or was it right for them to use appropriated codes as normal?

### General

Since there is already a COOP in place; why not use that as a base to create a comparable Ops shutdown plan?

There was too much upper management communication filled with apologies before and after, and not enough detail on what is happening and what happened, the things they wanted to know and needed to know. Employees appreciated that managers wanted to say something but it was out of proportion compared to no communication at all.

People don't understand what all the accounting codes are, and what are user fee activities and what aren't. We'd like to see some education on that provided to the field.

## **Safety and Health**

Last April I was fortunate enough to be able to attend the APHIS Safety Conference in Anniston, Alabama (not for the union but as a safety coordinator). Hopefully over the next few years all the safety coordinators get the opportunity to go to the Safety Conference because it is a fantastic experience, and even though it's not exactly an NAAE activity, I just want to spread the word. NAAE does very much appreciate a cooperative and open relationship with APHIS and PPQ safety. Why? Because we all have the same goal: the health and well-being of PPQ employees. So, for four days APHIS Safety put on a series of courses that we safety coordinators could pick and choose from depending on what our work unit's needs were. (Hazard Communication, Lab and Driving Ergonomics, Field Safety, PPE, Donning and Doffing, SCBA Training, Workplace Hazards, and Facility Inspections were the principal topics.) This conference was just for PPQ employees and that made a huge difference, allowing the topics to be more applicable and relevant to the work we do. The last APHIS Safety Conference I'd attended was a long time ago in Salt Lake City. It was for all of APHIS, which does have its value, but to be honest, was horribly dull. At the time, they were attempting to give the 10-hour OSHA training. I don't know what the AgLearn course is like, but about the only thing I remember from that meeting is being read to out of the CFR, and being incredibly bored. This conference was the polar opposite. It was interesting, applicable, and interactive. I cannot applaud APHIS Safety enough for the excellent job they did. Also, it was a great chance to meet people from other areas and learn about what goes on in their work units. I've missed some of these meeting opportunities. I'm not a fan of TDYs; I'd rather just stay home. This meeting was really refreshing. It was a great opportunity, and I really enjoyed it and honestly haven't been able to say that in a long time about agency meetings.

## **Overtime Issues**

One characteristic of our NAAE membership that I think makes NAAE members unique is their inquisitiveness. They are always questioning, not taking anything for granted. To me, that's one of the most important roles that NAAE plays for our members, a source of information. Rules, regulations and procedures are all tucked away in different places, and it seems field managers just don't know how or where to find the answers. And even when they do, employees often need a second source to get that confirmed, suspicious that they are. That's us. Anytime something doesn't sound right or you have a question that you don't know how or

where to go to get an answer, contact an Executive Committee member. If we know the answer, we will tell you or at least point you in the right direction, and if we don't know the answer, we will get it for you or at least do our best to come up with it.

That's what happened not too long ago at one location. Local management determined that if an employee had to leave the work site before the end of his/her shift in order to be on time to an overtime job that started after the end of the shift, it was contiguous overtime and the 2-hour minimum didn't apply. WRONG, wrong, wrong. And luckily it just didn't sound right to the adversely affected employee so she sent it on to the Executive Committee for confirmation. We brought it up to PPQ that the overtime was being charged incorrectly, and we were able to get the situation resolved amicably, with back pay and without filing a grievance. On management's behalf, this mistake was just that, a mistake. The intentions were right, trying to work through APHIS Directive 402.3 and pay employees correctly. Unfortunately, in this case the directive was simply misinterpreted. Management finally agreed with us.

Realistically this is a situation that is likely to occur more and more frequently. Title 7 overtime is complicated, and as we lose institutional memory there will be more instances that need correcting. We had a situation a few years ago where a SPHD and a PHSS, neither of whom had any experience with Title 7 work, had an arrangement where the PHSS was issuing phytos on the weekends for comp time. Once we heard about it, we were able to correct the situation. It happens, and through communication we can fix it!

### **SITC Officer/ PHSS Blended Position Description**

As discussed in previous newsletters, NAAE has been very involved in the changes being made to SITC over the past couple years. The latest, which really isn't recent since it has been dragging on for a really long time, is the Blended Position Description or "blended PD". This new position does exactly what it sounds like, mashes together everything in a SITCO PD and a PHSS PD. The idea here is that if there is a location that has SITC duties, but not enough for one employee to fill 100% of the time, but would be more than 25% of this employee's time, that employee, whether currently a SITCO or a PHSS, would be converted to this new PD. Of course there are lots of managers out there who see this as a way to not spend money on travel expenses (since many SITCOs have large coverage areas that might require an overnight in order to perform certain duties) and want to reassign duties to one position from



the other position (SITCO gets PHSS work or vice versa) and in that way plan to keep t the SITC duties less than 25% so that there's no need to change the PD. That's perfectly allowable. That's not to say we're in favor of it, or that the employees affected will be in favor of it, but it is something that Management has the right to do.

So, why haven't you seen more about this? Because we're still in negotiations over it. We know that there are employees out there who have already been assigned some additional duties, either SITC or those of a PHSS. We've tried to get that corrected, but if it hasn't been, let us know right away. The problem is that all the guidance from Management going out to the SPHDs committed to nothing changing before October 2013, like the beginning of the new fiscal year was some magical time. It wasn't, and we all know what happened in October (the government shutdown, we know many people never got to experience it, and it was business as usual), which effectively derailed everything including our Blended PD negotiations. They've been slow to get going again but we hope to conclude them soon.

Likely the biggest piece of the resulting change will be training. PPQ has committed repeatedly to not assigning new duties to anyone before they've been sufficiently trained. But what is sufficient training? I am certain that no one wants to learn my bad habits and then be held accountable for doing the job right, so that most likely means BAST and FLETC training. I empathize with those employees who may be required to attend lengthy training; I know how much I would hate that. This training should be slated for employees who are going to have new duties, whether it's 25% or less than that with no PD change.

Once negotiations are complete, NAAE will be signing an MOU with Management. We'll post it on our website and hopefully it'll be on the APHIS Labor Relations site, too.

### **PPQ Guiding Coalition**

Hopefully this new PPQ group, the PPQ Guiding Coalition, rings a bell. If it doesn't, there was an email that came out on August 20<sup>th</sup> last year from the Deputy Administrator. In it he announced the group, explained what it was going to do and solicited applications. I'm not going to do a very good job of explaining here what this group is or is going to do, so I encourage you to go back and review the email. In a nutshell this is a group that is all about networks, the formal and informal ones that PPQ employees have. The idea is to use these networks to get ideas for improvements and projects and to improve communication. The group is

made up of a pretty good cross section of PPQ and includes field, Hub, CPHST, Riverdale, and PDC employees plus the unions and association in PPQ -- NAAE of course, for which I am the representative, plus the National Association of Plant Protection and Quarantine Office Support Employees (NAPPQOSE) and the National Association of Plant Protection and Quarantine Managers (NAPPQM)). At the beginning there were 21 members, but the group has been reduced by a few already. For now, we're just getting started. We've finalized a charter and are getting prepared for a face to face meeting, after which I hope to have a better idea of where this group is going and what exactly it's going to do. So stay tuned!

### **An Accounting of the Past Two Years**

Communication is and always has been our biggest shortfall as a union, but not by design. We just don't have the staff or time allotted to communicate as often as we would like with our bargaining unit members. NAAE does not do enough to let our members know about the activities we're involved in on a daily basis. Much we really can't share (because of individual representation and guidance) but we're going to try from this point on to do a better job of at least hitting the high and low points. For example, we've had two employees receive Removal notices. We were able to get one notice changed, but we were not successful with the other notice. That was a huge low point. We've been involved heavily in some local issues; Miami is one such location. We've been involved in an advisory capacity with other locals. That is the day-to-day representational side of things, supporting our people whether they are "at large" employees (those without a local branch) or local presidents.

Additionally, we must consider and respond to all of the Pre-decisional Involvement (PDI) opportunities and Official Notices for changes in working conditions that we receive from Management. These activities we can share, and hopefully it gives everyone a better idea of what national activities we're involved in. Unfortunately I'm not as organized as I thought so I spent the day going through emails to put together a list of things we have been involved in on your behalf over the past 24+ months. I can't promise this is complete, because my filing system is less than perfect, but it is pretty darn close to everything we've received nationally, and some regionally (I don't get many of those, but sometimes Willis or Arlo are out, or sometimes it gets sent to me by accident) for the past two and a half fiscal years. So keep in mind that, if compiled fully and accurately, there'd be even longer lists of regional notices and opportunities for PDI.

In this list there are a few things to keep in mind. Sometimes there are repeat topics, which could be due to the fact that changes were made to a document and then later other changes were made to the same document, or other times it might be 6 months before the change actually gets implemented so we get notice from Management again. Sometimes the change never does get implemented. The same goes for the PDI; sometimes it's a change that's considered and later dismissed, sometimes it's a change that we don't have a right to get Official Notice on, but we do for PDI (for purposes of PDI we get everything whether it's negotiable or not). Also, while some of the topics may be areas we'd love to change, one thing to remember is that our PDI participation and negotiating doesn't mean we get everything we (or you) want. Management may be pushing back, and the federal statute under which we as a federal union operates puts limits on what we can do to foster your interests as government employees.

### **Fiscal Year 2014 So Far**

#### PPQ- Notice

Use of Web Roster

Residential Survey SOP (also had a working group to develop it with a union rep on it)

Approval Plan and SOP for Regulated Garbage

Change in Procedures for Processing APHIS 29s

Condition of Employment Reinstatement for entry-level PHSS attending BAST

SNICAS Instruction Manual

#### PPQ- PDI

Shutdown Details

Condition of Employment Reinstatement for entry-level PHSS attending BAST

Recall Working Group

#### APHIS/ MRP- Notices

APHIS Directive 1810.1 Emergency Notification System

MRP 5400 Motor Vehicle Manual

#### APHIS/MRP- PDI

MRP Directive 1620.2 Acquisition and Use of Commercial Storage Facilities

APHIS Shutdown Contingency Plan and Startup Plan

#### USDA- Notice

DR 4040-430 Performance Management

#### Other

Transit Benefit Service Interruption (during the shutdown)

### **Fiscal Year 2013**

#### PPQ- Notice

Updated Uniform Wearing Guidelines MOU

<http://WWW.AGInspectors.org>

Preclearance and Offshore Programs Travel Policies for TDY Travelers  
Change to PPQ Technician Qualifications for GS-0421 Vacancies  
SOP Number PPQ-FO-SOP 13-0001 Awards  
Pilot Program for Molecular Diagnostics  
Blended PHSS and SITCO Position Description  
SITC SOP 24B: Interagency Referral Instructions  
SITC Analysts SOP 36: Data Quality

#### PPQ- PDI

Budget Briefing  
Pre-Shutdown Details, Contingency Plan  
Admin Staffing Changes for ND, SD, Dallas, ID and CO  
Mobile Device Working Group  
Medical Monitoring Working Group  
Cross Functional Work Group- Training Plans for Field Operations  
Survey for PPQ Officers doing Biotechnology Inspections  
Change to PPQ Technician Qualifications for GS-0421 Vacancies  
Process to Approve Participation in Large Meetings  
SOP for Proper Recording of Time Sheets  
SR-1164 Processing  
Residential Surveys Working Group  
Blended PHSS and SITCO Position Description  
SITC Analysts SOP 36: Data Quality  
Changes to the SITC Risk Guidance Decision Table  
SITC Reference Guide Revision Group  
SITC Officer Performance Elements  
Safety Statements in SNICAS Trace Requests

#### APHIS/ MRP- Notices

MRP Directive 4790 Safety and Health Program  
MRP Staffing System Transition from Hiring Management to “eRecruit”  
HRDG 4500 Recruitment and Retention Incentives  
APHIS Directive 3440 Information Security Program  
APHIS Directive 3140-5 Information Systems Security Roles and Responsibilities  
MRP 4300.2 Reasonable Accommodation Program  
Electronic Travel Service 2 (ETS-2)  
APHIS Mobilization Guide  
APHIS Directive 3330.1 Radio Management Office  
APHIS Directive 3130.1 Information Technology Exception Request Process  
APHIS Administrative Notice 13-3 Laboratory Ventilation Management  
APHIS Administrative Notice 13-2 First Aid Kit Program  
APHIS Administrative Notice 13-1 Off-Highway Vehicles, Powered Equipment, and Boating Safety  
HRDG 4630 Weather Dismissals  
HRDG 4630 Home Leave  
MRP Directive 4550.2 Premium Pay  
MRP Directive 4368.1 Telework Program  
MRP Directive 4080.1 Transit Incentive Program  
APHIS Directive 3120.2 Computer and Mobile Device Naming Conventions  
Change to Forms AD-435a and AD-435b Performance Plan, Progress Review and Appraisal Worksheet

## APHIS/MRP PDI

GOV Brochure

HRDG 4550 Premium Pay

HRDG 4610 Tours of Duty

APHIS Directive 3130.1 Information Technology Exception Request Process

APHIS Agreements Management Manual

HRDG 4630 Home Leave

HRDG 4630 Weather Dismissals

APHIS Pulse Survey

MRP Procedure for Acceptance of Volunteer Services

MRP Directive 4630.1 Absence & Leave: Employee Funerals

HRDG 4630 Absence & Leave: Employee Funerals

MRP Directive 4790.1 Safety, Health, Workers' Compensation and Environmental Protection Program

APHIS Directive 1810.1 Emergency Notification System

## USDA

DR 4030-335-002 Merit Promotion and Internal Placement

DR 3640-001 Identity, Credential and, Access Management

Employee Requirement to Sign Acknowledgement of Department and Agency Fleet Policy

## Other

Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey

New Transit Subsidy

Paperless Benefits Statements

Medical Clearance Required for Foreign TDYs over 30 days

## **Fiscal Year 2012**

### PPQ- Notice

Change in Reporting Lines for SITC Analysts

NIMT Selection Matrix and Self Certifying Questionnaire

Certification of Pesticide Applicators Policy

Change in Authority Statement on the back of the PPQ-516 (ID cards)

IS 700, IS 800 and ICS 100 Training Course Exclusions from Requirement

Export Treatment Policy 8/5/11 Verifying Treatments

Admin Duties from OK consolidated with the AR Office Manager

Admin Duties from Olney, TX consolidated with Dallas Admin Duties

Admin Duties from MT spread out to others

EAB Personnel Directed Reassignments

SITC Training Policy

SNICAS Training for SITCOs

Change in Reporting Lines for SITC Analysts and SITC Officers

### PPQ- PDI

Admin Vacancy CO SPHD Office

EAB Personnel Directed Reassignments / Voluntary Reassignments

Cultural Transformation Working Group

Online Training for Regulated Organism Facility Inspections

Hot Water Immersion Treatment Training

IPHIS Ordering Module

<http://WWW.AGInspectors.org>

Reconciliation of ACMS Records  
SITC Board of Advisors  
SNICAS Training for SITCOs

APHIS/ MRP- Notice

MRP Directive 4530.1 Salary Rate Determination  
MRP Directive 5003.1 Appropriations Restrictions for Financial Transactions with Felons and Tax Delinquent Corporations  
MRP Directive 4351 Reduction in Force  
APHIS Directive 3140.5 Information Security Systems Roles and Responsibilities  
MRP Directive 4500.1 Recruitment and Retention Incentives  
HRDG 4500 Sections E & F Recruitment and Retention Incentives  
SF-1164 Processing with WebTA  
MRP Directive 1620 Changes to Space and Lease of Field Offices and Facilities  
HRDG 4630 Absence and Leave  
HRDG 4630 Lump Sum Payment  
APHIS New Employee Survey  
APHIS Directive 1040.2 Consultation with Elected Leaders of Federally Recognized Indian Tribes  
APHIS Directive 6710.1 International Communication and Correspondence Policy  
APHIS Directive 6701.3 Sanitary and Phytosanitary Trade Management within APHIS  
Reinvestigations for Employees in Positions of Public Trust  
Discontinuation of the Fitness Subsidy Program  
APHIS Mobilization Guide  
Discontinuation of Relocation Services

APHIS/MRP- PDI

VERA/ VSIP (Early Retirement and Buyouts)  
Discontinuation of Relocation Services  
APHIS Mobilization Guide  
MRP Directive 4351.1 Appendix C: Competitive Areas for RIF  
MRP Directive 4500.1 Recruitment and Retention Incentives  
HRDG 4500 Sections E & F Recruitment and Retention Incentives  
HRDG 4630 Absence and Leave  
SF-1164 Processing with WebTA  
APHIS Agreements Management Manual  
MRP Directive 5003.1 Appropriations Restrictions for Financial Transactions with Felons and Tax Delinquent Corporations  
APHIS 3440 Classified Security Information Handbook  
FMLA Qualifying Exigency  
APHIS Directive 3140.3 Internet Use and Security Policy  
APHIS Training Survey  
MRP Directive 4530.1 Salary Rate Determination  
APHIS Directive 3220.1 IT Acquisition Approval Request Requirements

Other- Notice

FMLA Qualifying Exigency

## **New Emblem Contest**

It's time for NAAE to update our emblem. While the one we have has served us well, it's difficult to manipulate and time to look at some fresh ideas. I've been told this was attempted in the past and unfortunately it failed. This time we hope will be different. So anyone who is interested, has an artistic flair, or even knows someone else that has a touch of creativity, see what you can come up with. Send your ideas to any Executive Committee member and one month before the convention we'll evaluate them and pick the best one. The winner will get a free trip to the 2014 Convention in St. Louis, Missouri. We can't guarantee that we'll use the emblem entry, but we can ensure that the best one will earn the designer a free trip!

## **PPQ Forum Metrics**

*Arlo Wiltenburg, Eastern Region Vice President*

On December 9, 2009, Executive Order 13522, "Creating Labor-Management Forums to Improve Delivery of Government Services," became effective. The purpose of the Executive Order is to establish a cooperative and productive form of labor-management relations throughout the Executive branch, including USDA, as a means of improving the effectiveness and efficiency of government operations. In 2011, PPQ created a Forum with the National Association of Plant Protection and Quarantine Office Support Employees (NAPPQOSE) and the National Association of Agriculture Employees (NAAE). The Executive Order requires the PPQ Forum to develop a set of "metrics" each year that can be used to measure the results of the PPQ Forum. Metrics are used to measure program success in government and other arenas. The PPQ Forum has set goals in its metrics to measure success of certain activities. The PPQ Forum is using an increase in the results of the Employee Viewpoint Survey ("EVS") data as the measure.

There are three areas that metrics must be developed for:

1. Labor-Management Relationship
2. Employee Satisfaction and Engagement
3. Mission and Service Delivery

Each metric category is composed of several sub-elements.

Since 2011, the PPQ Forum has developed and worked on meeting the elements that it has listed as its metric goals.

For FY 2012, the PPQ Forum used the following elements as the metric goals.

1. Labor-Management Relationship
  - a. Organizational Support: On November 14, 2012, the Deputy Administrator (DA) sent an email to all managers and supervisors reminding them of expectations and requirements.
  - b. Information Sharing: Management engaged the union in Pre-Decisional Involvement on 55 occasions during 2012.
  - c. Pre-Decisional Involvement: Labor Relations provided training for field managers on three separate occasions, including obligations to engage in PDI, and the union and management participated in joint LMR training.
  
2. Employee Satisfaction and Engagement
  - a. Improve work/life experience: A Forum email account was created in Outlook.
  - b. Leadership: Management conducted 24 Formal Discussions to discuss the reorganization of PPQ.
  - c. My work experience: The administrative working group met 9 times and agreed on 11 documents that would benefit the administrative employees in their daily work activities.
  
3. Mission and Service Delivery
  - a. Agility: The PPQ/NAAE MOB Guide MOU was implemented on October 1, 2012.

For FY 2013, the PPQ Forum used the following elements as the metric goals.

1. Labor-Management Relationship
  - a. Productivity of the Relationship: The goal was to jointly develop Interest-Based Bargaining webinars. This was accomplished and they are being hosted at this time.
  - b. Information Sharing: The goal was to increase the extent to which management (field managers) discloses information as part of the problem-solving process. The results are still being tabulated.
  - c. Pre-Decisional Involvement: The goal was to increase the number of PDI/consultations at field locations. The results are still being tabulated.



2. Employee Satisfaction and Engagement
  - a. Personal Work Experience: The goal was to jointly create an employee/group spotlight process and procedure. This group has created this spotlight process and procedure. (More information is in the newsletter.)
3. Mission and Service Delivery
  - a. Process/Cycle Time: The goal was to jointly work on a process to ensure consistency across PPQ associated with medical monitoring. This goal was accomplished, and the resulting documents were provided to the field on December 23, 2013.

The PPQ Forum is currently working on the FY 2014 metric goals. Here are some of the elements that are being considered.

1. Labor-Management Relationship
  - a. Productivity of the Relationship: The goal would be to jointly develop a Consultation/PDI webinar and host at least 4 webinars.
2. Employee Satisfaction and Engagement
  - a. My Satisfaction: The goal would be to increase the number of ALL SPHD Call minutes posted to SharePoint in order to improve process for Employees to receive information from management regarding happenings in their organization.
  - b. My Satisfaction: The goal would be to provide additional resources for employees to be made aware of training, detail, and promotion opportunities.
3. Mission and Service Delivery
  - a. Internal Resource Management: The goal would be to develop an SOP to improve Succession Planning.

The PPQ Forum has asked the Union to help with suggestions to address the metrics concerning Employee Satisfaction and Engagement. We would like to receive suggestions from the membership for ways that would approve individual satisfaction with their jobs. Please send any suggestions that you have to me: [awiltenburg@yahoo.com](mailto:awiltenburg@yahoo.com).

## **Convention**

Victor Zeno and Alyson Bendzinski, our NAAE Convention ChairPeople have been hard at work planning our 2014 convention. This year the NAAE National Convention will take place in St. Louis Missouri at the Hilton St. Louis Downtown at the Arch from Sunday April 6th through Wednesday April 9<sup>th</sup>. For more details, check out the flier they created that is soon to be posted on the NAAE homepage ([www.aginspectors.org](http://www.aginspectors.org)).

See your old Union friends. See your young Union friends. Make new Union friends. It is an opportunity to receive training on labor law and what a union can do. There are also opportunities to meet PPQ's top managers, consult with them, ask them pointed questions, and find out what they are thinking—where they are taking the Agency and where the Agency is going.

A month before the convention, we submit a list of questions to PPQ management that we would like to hear answers to. We try to put together a list of all the issues that we know about, but this is an opportunity for you to get your questions answered from the top. Whether you plan to attend or not, we'll get you answers. Submit any questions you'd like us to ask to me at [sarahrehberg1@yahoo.com](mailto:sarahrehberg1@yahoo.com).

If you're planning to attend, considering it or on the fence, request your annual leave now. While initially you must request annual leave, following the Convention, NAAE will forward the names and attendees to management, requesting that they all be granted official time for their attendance at the meeting. Traditionally, within the pay period, management will determine the number of hours of official time granted to all identified attendees which will be applied to the T&A. In past years, management has granted official time for approximately 85% of the time spent (normal working hours) at the Convention. All time used not credited as official time will be charged to annual leave. Official Union business – not classifiable as “official time” -- is considered on the opening Sunday. The balance should be “official time.”

Please let Victor ([zenvictor@gmail.com](mailto:zenvictor@gmail.com)) or Alyson ([alybend@rocketmail.com](mailto:alybend@rocketmail.com)) know early as to your desires and intentions to come to the Convention. It will also help us get you an information packet once details have been firmed up.

--PLEASE PLAN TO ATTEND! There will be plenty to learn and much fun for all. Hope to see you there!

## **Labor Relations 101 and Interest Based Bargaining Webinars: A Little Offering for Your Union Mind**

*Mike Randall, NAAE Vice President and Chief Negotiator*

During the fall of 2013 and January Of 2014 the PPQ Forum (composed of your NAAE representatives, representatives of the Secretarial and Clerical Employees, our Management and APHIS Labor Relations) offered a number of webinar sessions covering the topics “Labor Relations 101” and “Interest Based Bargaining.” The training was developed and presented by members of the Forum.

As the name implies, LR 101 was a whirlwind tour of the Labor Statute and a number of basic principles we must appreciate as active union employees (and hopefully the managers appreciated it too.) The training was originally conceived as required training for managers, but once the word got out, we had representative attendance from all sorts of Agency employees. While the opportunity to attend a session has passed, we will make a copy of the PowerPoint presentation available (and some others) on our website: [www.AgInspectors.org](http://www.AgInspectors.org) , in the very near future.

The second group of sessions provided a look at interest based bargaining or IBB—a less contentious method of negotiation that often provides better solutions for the negotiating parties than produced by standard methods of positional proposal-based bargaining. IBB is compatible with pre-decisional involvement (PDI)—an opportunity to hear about and influence possible changes in working conditions before they are proposed , which NAAE views as a vehicle to better labor-management relations. Live sessions are over, but this webinar will be preserved for posterity on AgLearn and should be available shortly.

### **PPQ Spotlight Initiative**

The PPQ Labor Management Forum, created under Executive Order 13522, established the PPQ Spotlight Initiative, which is an employee managed program highlighting varied contributions and achievements of Plant Protection and Quarantine employees and programs.

Any PPQ employee, with or without supervisory approval, may nominate either an individual or team/work group using the “ PPQ Spotlight Employee/Group Nomination Form” for achievements that have occurred within the last 12 months or within the current fiscal year. Nominations solicited quarterly via email, will also be accepted any time for review by the Spotlight Selection Committee, which is comprised of employees and managers.

The employee and/or group chosen for spot lighting, with their consent, will be featured in a special employee newsletter created by the Spotlight Selection Committee called ***The PPQ Spotlight***. There is no limit to the number of times employee(s)/groups may be recognized for different achievements.

THE END???

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**No! This is the beginning. We Have  
Just Begun to Fight!  
Now More Than Ever! Encourage Your Co-  
Workers to Join! Strength In Numbers!**

**YOUR NATIONAL NAAE REPRESENTATIVES**  
**(Your Input & Feedback Is Most Welcome) PLEASE MAIL ALL DUES**  
**WITHHOLDING FORMS TO NAAE NAT'L PRESIDENT FOR SIGNATURE**

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**PLEASE NOTIFY THE NATIONAL SECRETARY OF AN ADDRESS CHANGE!**

This Newsletter is distributed to NAAE members & to members of the House and Senate Agriculture Committees

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