



HR Broadcast

Introducing **Teleworks!**

A new and more efficient way to request approval to work at home.

Teleworks! is an MRP automated telework application system and the first of its kind within the USDA.

Teleworks! was developed as part of an ISO 9000 initiative and has streamlined the MRP Form 210-R application process.

An APHIS pilot of the **Teleworks!** system began September 7. With the inception of the pilot, MRP Form 210-R paper applications for APHIS employees are no longer accepted.

Teleworks! features include:

- a web-based process for individuals to complete the MRP Form 210-R on-line and to electronically submit their agreement for

review and approval

- an e-mail status notification for individuals and supervisors at each stage of the MRP Form 210-R application process
- a streamlined MRP Form 210-R renewal process
- the elimination of the problems and delays experienced with the MRP Form 210-R paper application process (e.g., 'snail mail')
- up-to-date MRP telework program guidance
- compliance with existing cybersecurity policies
- automated report generation for OPM, USDA, and ad hoc purposes

If you have questions about **Teleworks!**, please contact Tara Green, System Administrator, at (301) 734-6466 or Ed Slaga, MRP Telework Program Manager, at (612) 336-3306.

Coming in the January Issue:

- ❖ Classification Audits
- ❖ W-4 Tax Exempt Information
- ❖ How CSRS/FERS Annuity is Calculated

The Benefits Buzz



OPEN SEASONS

The Federal Employees Group Life Insurance (FEGLI) open season ended on September 30, 2004. Remember that elections won't be effective any earlier than September 2005.

The **Thrift Savings Plan (TSP)** open season runs October 15 – December 31, 2004.

The **Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB)** open season runs November 8 – December 13, 2004.

The **Flexible Spending Account (FSA)** open season runs November 8 – December 13, 2004.

Your previous FSA election does not continue each year – you must make a new election during the open season if you want to take advantage of these spending accounts for health care and dependent care costs in 2005!

For additional Open Season information, click here <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/benefits.html>

Planning to retire at the end of this year?

We process more retirements for the last pay period in December than for any other pay period of the year. Make sure your retirement application forms are completed and turned in to your Benefits Specialist 45 to 60 days before your retirement date **so we can ensure you are eligible for retirement and we can work with you** to avoid delays because of missing or incomplete forms.

We recommend that you use the planning checklist so that there are no surprises.

http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/benefits/retirement_checklist.html

EMPLOYEE EXPRESS DISAPPEARS

Remember that effective October 1, 2004, Employee Express will no longer be available to USDA employees for making payroll changes. Employees who wish to make payroll changes electronically should access the National Finance Center's Employee Personal Page (EPP) and select the 'Self Service' option. If you have any questions, contact your servicing HR assistant in the Processing Section of HRO-Minneapolis.

AWARDS PROCESSING

When submitting awards forms to be processed, please remember that awards will be effective the pay period after they are received in the HRO-Minneapolis, Processing Section. This, however, is contingent upon the approving official signing the award **prior to the effective date of the pay period in which the form is processed in HRO.** For example, an award signed on Oct. 8 (pp20) and received in HRO on Oct 14 (pp20) will be effective Oct 17(pp 21.) Beginning PP 1, 2005, all award checks will be sent through Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT).

EXTRA! EXTRA! **READ ALL ABOUT IT**



45-Day Hiring Model

Over the past few years, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has implemented a set of initiatives to make the Federal Government more competitive in the race to hire talent. Continuing in this effort, OPM has developed the **45-Day Hiring Model**. The model establishes timeframes for meeting specific milestones in the hiring process. The milestones measured are those that fall between the time an announcement closes to the time an offer is extended to a job applicant. The guidelines establish a goal of **30 workdays, or 6 work weeks**, for the selecting official to review applications, schedule and conduct interviews, make reference checks and extend job offers.

To help facilitate achievement of this goal, all selection certificates issued to MRP selecting officials are now being **issued for 45 calendar days**. Selecting officials may request extensions of a certificate. Extensions are issued in one 45-day extension and, if necessary, for Merit Promotion certificates one additional 30-day extension. When requesting extensions, selecting officials will be reminded of the established goals and may be asked to submit written documentation regarding the need for the extension. Additional guidance regarding the 45-Day Hiring Model is provided with the case exam/merit promotion certificate instructions provided with each certificate.

Please join HR in this initiative by making every effort to meet the guidelines. Additional Information may be obtained from your servicing Human Resources Specialist, Staffing.