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Excellence



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<http://www.arsnet.usda.gov/pastg/>

April 2009

and Professional Secretaries Day. The names were changed to Administrative Professionals Week and Administrative Professionals Day to keep pace with changing job titles and expanding responsibilities of today's administrative workforce.

Over the years, Administrative Professionals Week has become one of the largest workplace observances. The event is celebrated worldwide, bringing together millions of people for community events, educational seminars and individual corporate activities recognizing support staff.

Today, there are more than 4.1 million secretaries and administrative assistants working in the United States, according to U.S. Department of Labor statistics, and 8.9 million people working in various administrative support roles. More than 475,000 administrative professionals are employed in Canada. Millions more administrative professionals work in offices all over the world.

This year Administrative Professionals Week is **April 19-25** with Administrative Professionals Day on Wednesday, **April 22**.

From International Association of Administrative Professionals website <http://www.iaap-hq.org/APW/apwindex.htm>

MWA NEW ARRIVALS



Janeen Polen,

Program Support Asst., Wooster, OH

I am an Ohio native, born in Akron, raised in Wooster, OH. Before I came to USDA I was in the US Air Force – for 23 ½ years. I was enlisted and retired from the Air Force. All my time in the USAF was spent in Personnel/Human resources. I have been married for 22 years and I have three children, 20, 16, and 13 years old. I live on an old farm that has been in my family since the 1870s. I have 3 cats, 2 dogs, a turtle, and 25 chickens.

MESSAGE FROM THE CO-CHAIRS

Opportunity awaits! Yes, you have an opportunity to make a difference that will impact your peers.

The Program Administrative Support Task Group (PASTG) is improving the usability of the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) manual currently on its website. We are looking for Program Support Assistants and Secretaries to form a subcommittee willing to help with this important project.

PASTG plans to add an explanation narrative to each of the tasks, which would provide guidance along functional lines, defining the secretary's roles and responsibilities; where, why, and how they fit into the process. This product will be used by all Program Support Assistants and Secretaries across the Midwest Area, so we would like input from many end users, to be sure the product is the best that it can be.

Please notify Kim Meyers at Kim.Meyers@ars.usda.gov by **Friday, May 8, 2009** if you are able to assist with this task.

Sherri Buxton & Kim Meyers
Co-Chairs

ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONALS MONTH – APRIL

Since 1952, the International Association of Administrative Professionals has honored office workers by sponsoring Administrative Professionals Week. Today, it is one of the largest workplace observances outside of employee birthdays and major holidays. In the year 2000, IAAP announced a name change for Professional Secretaries Week



Harold Parks III.

Program Support Assistant, West Lafayette, IN

I was born on March 16, 1960 in Fort Worth, Texas and grew up in Atlanta, Georgia. On June 30, 1978 I graduated from Frederick Douglass High School and entered the United States Army where I served 23 years of service. Seven years was served as a Military Police Special Weapons Site Custodian, three years as a Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Warfare Noncommissioned Officer, and 13 years as a Human Resources and Administration Assistant Supervisor. I am a Cold War and Gulf War Veteran and my Military Assignments include Germany, France, Denmark, Hawaii, Guam, and a number of locations throughout the nation. On October 1, 2001 I retired and attended Saint Leo University where I received my BA in Human Resource Administration with a minor in Religion. I worked with the Georgia Department of Agriculture as a General Clerk for two years and on February 9, 2003, I became a member of the USDA family. I worked with APHIS, Veterinary Services at the Georgia Area Office for one year as a Program Assistant where I process administrative actions and travel for volunteers assisting the agency during the END Task Force. During January of 2004 I transferred to Animal Health Policies and Programs, National Poultry Improvement Plan where I worked for five years as a Veterinary Program Assistant and Meeting/Conference Coordinator. I have three sons. My oldest, Jamal turned 30 in January, my middle son, Gregory, is 18 and will graduate from Newton High School in Covington, Georgia on May 30, and my youngest, Timothy, who is 17 will graduate from Duluth High School next year.

My Military Service is very important to me and I try to attend any Military Event that is close to me. Each year I try to attend the Army Retiree Appreciation Day held at Fort Knox, Kentucky. I enjoy bowling, basketball (when my body will let me play), walking, and spending time with my sons.

EEO ACTIVITIES

By Nancy Sanders, West Lafayette, IN

Most of us struggle annually with the issue of meeting and especially exceeding our EEO element in our performance standard. This appraisal period I looked to the internet to help me be informed and find things I might do on my own or share with my unit. One site I found is this Earth Calendar at <http://www.earthcalendar.net/index.php>. There is a variety of events around the world by day, week and month. If I find an event of interest, I can look it up further and share with my multi-national unit. It's fun and informative. Please share your ideas and unit plans to exceed your EEO element, Nancy.Sanders@ars.usda.gov. This will be a recurring item in the PASTG NewsNotes and you can take the credit in your performance appraisal for sharing your events.

HOW TO GREEN YOUR DAY JOB

By Ann Houser, Columbus, OH

(Information compiled from <http://www.grist.org/>)

Level One: The Baby Steps

Be a switch hitter. Your parents may have been saying it for decades, but just in case they haven't, we will: Turn off the lights. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, commercial buildings account for 18 percent of the nation's greenhouse-gas emissions. A good portion of the problem is caused by leaving lights on in vacant rooms -- that's a habit shared by about 50 percent of us, surveys show. Switch off the lights whenever you leave your workspace empty for more than 15 minutes, and especially when you leave for the day. And while you're flipping switches ...

Turn that computer off. Contrary to old wives' tales, shutting down your computer each day will not cause any damage. One caveat: Your IT department might want computers left on for nightly procedures. You could try to convince them to do their backups during the day instead. Either way, set your machine to go into sleep mode after 15 minutes of inactivity. Every PC left on 24-7 over the course of a year results in more than 1,000 extra pounds of greenhouse gases. Since there will soon be 1 billion PCs in the world, the widespread use of sleep mode could prevent the annual release of

hundreds of millions of tons of global warming gases, saving billions of dollars in the process.

Level Two: The Next Steps

Print to the finish. A few tips for navigating the "paperless office" of the new millennium (you know the one that's still filled with paper): Print fewer copies. Each year, the average American office worker uses 10,000 pages of copy paper and businesses devour 15 million toner cartridges -- enough to stretch from New York City to Zurich, according to *The Green Book*. Use digital files instead and collaborate in work-sharing documents. If you must print, do it on both sides of the page, reuse paper that's only been printed on one side, and look into the free (Windows-compatible) software from GreenPrint that helps you avoid printing blank or unwanted pages.

Give your gadgets a rest. If you use printers, scanners, and copiers only on an occasional basis, turn them off until you need them. Same with the gizmos that clutter your desk: Unplug things like your cell phone charger, lamp, and coffeemaker when you're not using them (this is where a power strip comes in handy). In homes alone, the total energy lost from phantom power -- the electricity drawn even when products are turned off and in standby mode -- adds up to an estimated 65 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity each year, sending 87 billion pounds of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, says the Union of Concerned Scientists.

Work on your lunch habits. To save money and resources, BYOL. Or if you walk or bike to the takeout place, ask the counter person to skip the earth-hostile Styrofoam packaging. If you have a lunch room, stock it with reusable mugs and kitchenware; ask colleagues to donate items, if necessary. And if you're lucky enough to have an on-site cafeteria, try to encourage the manager to invest in local or organic eats. (By the way, coffee junkies, snub that plastic stir stick. It's estimated by some poor stir-stick-counter that 138 billion of them wind up in the trash each year.)

Chill. Heating and cooling systems suck up about 22 percent of energy used in the commercial sector, so if your climate controls are manually operated, turn them off when you don't need them. Open a window! Wear a Jimmy Carter cardigan! Or better yet, urge your office manager to get an automatic thermostat that keeps temps right.

Level Three: The Big Step

Push the envelope. Convince the powers-that-be to green up as many office supplies as possible, from toilet paper to electronic equipment to green power to, yes, envelopes. This isn't always easy: Green products can be more expensive than conventional ones, especially where electronics are involved. But the payoffs in the long-term include lower energy bills, reduced carbon footprints, happier employees, great PR, and even government recognition. No wonder some of the biggest corporations in the world are going eco. Bit by bit, byte by byte, your office can be a positive agent for change. And that's just good business.

Resources

Green office guides and info
Grist's [Toiling Point archives](#) offer information, examples of companies that are making changes, and advice on talking to your employer

Advice on saving energy in the workplace from [Green Living Ideas](#), the [U.S. Department of Energy](#), and the [American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy](#)

Tips on greening your office from the [Sierra Club](#), the [Natural Resources Defense Council](#), and the [U.S. EPA](#) [PDF]

Other useful resources include the [Green Workplace Blog](#), [Alliance to Save Energy](#), [Greenbiz](#), and *Greening Your Office: From Cupboard to Corporation, An A-Z Guide*

Green office supplies

[The Green Office](#)

[Green Home Environmental Store](#)

[Office Depot's "Buy Green"](#)

[Green Earth Office Supply](#)

[Energy Star product list](#)

[Green Guide product reviews](#)

NEED HELP FINDING A SPECIFIC ORDER IN CATS?

By Stacey Carlson and Sue Ohlendorf, Ames, IA
Information provided by Carol Moran

Here are some tips for searching for AD700s in CATS:

When you are in the CATS program

Go to Action
 Select AD-700
 Action
 Search Screen
 In the document sequence box:
 Enter the last 5 numbers of the AD-700 number
 (Don't type in the accounting code)
 Search
 Execute

How to look for a range of AD-700s do the following:

When in the search screen go to
 Document sequence box
 Enter the range of AD-700s you are looking for
 (e.g. 00145:00150)
 Execute

GOVTRIP TRAVEL PACKAGES

By Melissa Stiefel, East Lansing, MI

In-kind and foreign travel packages require certain documents to make a complete travel package. In order for Kit Mernick, FATA, to handle the amount of travel packages she receives, check sheets have been developed and posted on the PASTG website for your convenience. Following the check sheet is the surest way of preparing a complete package. There will be times when information supplied on the country clearance form is **tentative** until the travel has been approved by the Area Office, i.e., lodging when registration fee includes lodging or international meetings that require a first nights deposit to hold the reservation, and also when the in-kind agency has to provide the itinerary or lodging information. **Make note on the country clearance in red, highlight or bold that changes will be coming.** Amended Country Clearance forms **should be submitted via email through the Travel Coordinator to the FATA as soon as possible because it will hold up document processing.** For the latest version of the travel check sheet go to <http://www.arsnet.usda.gov/pastg/sop/travel/index.html> and click on foreign travel check list or outside funds check list (domestic).

PROJECT FILE TIP

By Gaile Saxton, Secretary/AO, Ames, IA

On the outside of my CRIS soft funds files, I make three labels for this file.

Label 1: Has the account number and the name of the project
 Label 2: Has the Log #.
 Label 3: Lists Cooperator, Amount and Duration

This way I can pick up a file and immediately know if it is the right file or not without opening it up.

I have 4 research projects in my research unit. I have color coordinated these files. Each research unit has a specific color for those research files for the main CRIS and the siblings.

TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR E-MAIL INBOX

By Sandra Groneberg, Morris, MN

Hints are from "Microsoft at Work – Manage Information"

1. Set Up a Simple and Effective E-mail Reference System.
 - A. Understand the difference between **reference information** and **action information**.
 - B. **Reference information** is information that is **not** required to complete an action; it is information that you want to keep in case you need it later.
 - C. **Action information** is information you **must have** to complete an action.
 - D. Develop a series of e-mail file folders where you **store reference information** to ensure easy access later.
2. Schedule Uninterrupted Time to Process and Organize E-Mail
 - A. Many e-mail messages require you to make a decision. Good decisions require focus, and focus requires uninterrupted attention. **Establish a regular time each day to process your e-mail.**
 - B. Book yourself a recurring appointment for an hour a day to process e-mail, and mark it as "busy." During this time don't take interruptions; work only on processing your Inbox. You may need to scan your email

- throughout the day to determine urgent messages.
3. Process One Item At a Time, Starting at the Top
 - A. Sort e-mail by the order in which you want to process it. For example, you can filter by date, subject, or who the e-mail is from.
 - B. Resist the temptation to jump around in your Inbox in no particular order. Begin processing the message at the top of your Inbox and only move to the second one after you've handled the first.
 4. Use the "Four D's for Decision Making" Model
 - A. DELETE IT
 - i. Questions to ask yourself to help you decide what to delete:
 1. Does the message relate to your main focus? If not, you can probably **delete it**.
 2. Does the message contain information you can find elsewhere? If so, **delete it**.
 3. Does the message contain information that you will refer to within the next six months? If not, **delete it**.
 4. Does the message contain information that you're required to keep? If not, **delete it**.
 - B. DO IT (in less than two minutes)
 - i. If you can't DELETE IT, then decide, "What specific **action** do I need to take?" and "Can I DO IT in less than two minutes?" If you can, just DO IT.
 - C. DELEGATE IT
 - i. If you can't DELETE IT or DO IT in two minutes or less, can you DELEGATE IT? If you can delegate it, do it right away. You should be able to compose and send the delegating message in about two minutes. Once you delegate the action, delete the original message or move it into your e-mail reference system.
 - D. DEFER IT
 - i. If you cannot DELETE IT, DO IT in less than two minutes, or DELEGATE IT, then the action required is something that only you can accomplish and that will take more than two minutes. Because this is your dedicated e-mail processing time, you

need to DEFER IT and deal with it after you are done processing your e-mail. There are two things you can do to defer a message:

1. Turn it into an actionable task or
2. Turn it into an appointment.

E. DO IT DAILY

8 TIPS TO SURVIVE IN AN OPEN-PLAN OFFICE

By Sue Ohlendorf and Karen Burianek, Ames, IA

While many workers would probably prefer a private office with a door, open-plan seating arrangements are common in businesses worldwide. And the benefits of "cubicle farms" are clear: they're cost-efficient, improve communication and collaboration between employees, and can increase productivity.

However, the open-plan office worker may find it difficult to concentrate in this environment – with phones ringing, colleagues talking and walking around, and office equipment running, the number of distractions can be overwhelming. Here are a few tips you and your colleagues can use to help make the most of the open office and improve the environment for everyone.

- 1. Keep the noise level down.** Don't use speaker phone or play any kind of sound on your PC without asking others whether it will bother them. In fact, it's better to use earphones to listen to podcasts, music or videos, and if you must use speaker phone or conduct a lot of conference calls, try to find a meeting room or other enclosed space. Remember that others can hear your phone conversations, so try to keep your voice down.
- 2. Manage your phones effectively.** The ringing of desk phones and mobile phones is one of the main sources of noise in an open-plan office, so be considerate. Turn down the volume of your desk phone and try to answer it within three rings. Select a mobile phone ring that won't bother others around you. If you will be away from your desk for a longer period of time, have your phone diverted directly to voicemail if possible.
- 3. Have a clean desk policy.** Get rid of all unnecessary papers and make sure garbage isn't left lying around your desk. Not only is this more considerate of people around you, a clear desk looks

more professional and will help you to be more organized and productive.

4. Don't hold meetings at your desk. If someone has been standing at your desk talking to you for more than a few minutes, suggest moving to a meeting room or the cafeteria.

5. Cancel unneeded meeting room reservations. Conference space is often valuable in open-plan offices. If you cancel or postpone a meeting and no longer need the meeting space, be sure to cancel your reservation too so that others can use the room.

6. Don't walk through "neighborhoods" of desks. Whenever possible, use main hallways or corridors rather than walking through people's workspaces.

7. Find ways to minimize distractions. As mentioned, using earphones helps to avoid disturbing others and it's a great way to block out office noise. Listen to music or try the free Simply Noise white noise generator to mask sounds.

8. Select quiet office equipment. Printers, copiers, fax machines and other equipment can all generate a significant amount of noise. HP offers a variety of printing and imaging devices that minimize sound and selected models include a "Quiet Print Mode" to reduce noise even more.

Open-plan offices can be enjoyable, collegiate places to spend your working hours. Following these simple tips will help you work more efficiently, and others will appreciate your consideration too.

REE Ethics Contacts:

<http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/hrd/ethics/agency.htm>

MARCH WAS WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

The Library of Congress, National Archives and Records Administration, National Endowment for the Humanities, National Gallery of Art, National Park Service, Smithsonian Institution and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum join in paying tribute to the generations of women whose commitment to nature and the planet have proved invaluable to society.

About Women's History Month

Before the 1970's, the topic of women's history was largely missing from general public consciousness. To address this situation, the Education Task Force of the Sonoma County (California) Commission on the Status of Women initiated a "Women's History Week" celebration in 1978 and chose the week of

March 8 to coincide with International Women's Day.

The celebration was met with positive response, and schools began to host their own Women's History Week programs. The next year, leaders from the California group shared their project at a Women's History Institute at Sarah Lawrence College. Other participants not only became determined to begin their own local Women's History Week projects but also agreed to support an effort to have Congress declare a national Women's History Week.

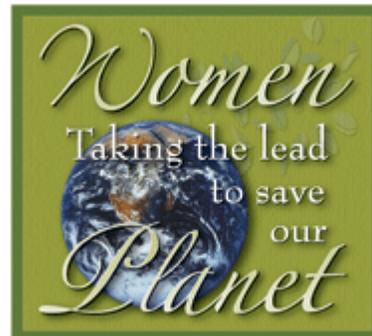
In 1981, Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-UT) and Rep. Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) cosponsored the first Joint Congressional Resolution proclaiming a "Women's History Week."

In 1987, the National Women's History Project petitioned Congress to expand the celebration to the entire month of March. Since then, the National Women's History Month Resolution has been approved every year with bipartisan support in both the House and Senate.

Information from the [National Women's History Project](#)

About This Year's Theme

Women Taking the Lead to Save Our Planet



In 2009, the National Women's History Project honors women who have taken the lead in the environmental or "green" movement. Rachel Carson, the founder of the contemporary environmental movement, serves as the iconic model of the theme, which recognizes scientists, engineers, business leaders, writers, filmmakers, conservationists, teachers, community organizers, religious or workplace leaders, or others whose lives show exceptional vision and leadership to save the planet. Taken from

<http://womenshistorymonth.gov/about.html>

For of list of the 2009 National Women's History
Honorees go to
<http://www.nwhp.org/whm/honorees.php>

**NATIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR
OFFICE PROFESSIONALS AND OTHER
PROFESSIONAL SITES**

National Advisory Council For Office Professionals

<http://www.arsnet.usda.gov/nacop/>

**Beltsville Area Administrative Support Advisory
Council**

<http://www.arsnet.usda.gov/baasac/>

**Headquarters Advisory Council for
Administrative Professionals**

<http://www.arsnet.usda.gov/hacap/>

Mid South Area Office Professionals

<http://msa.ars.usda.gov/osp/>**Northern Plains Area
Council Of Office Professionals**

[http://www.ars.usda.gov/Services/docs.htm?docid=
16162](http://www.ars.usda.gov/Services/docs.htm?docid=16162)

**Southern Plains Area Advisory Council for
Office Professionals**

<http://www.arsnet.usda.gov/acop/>