Plain Writing Act Compliance Report — April 11, 2014

This report outlines the progress towards implementing the Plain Writing Act of 2010 within the Department of Defense.

I. Senior Agency Official

Michael L. Rhodes, Director of Administration and Management, is the DoD Senior Official for plain language. The Washington Headquarters Services, Directives Division, oversees implementation and administration of the DoD Plain Language Program through the plain language point of contact. The point of contact may be reached at whs.mc-alex.esd.mbx.dod-plain-language@mail.mil.

II. Using Plain Language

DoD received no plain language amendment requests in 2013.

DoD agencies took many actions to implement plain language requirements in 2013.

- DoD
    - Writing style guides and plain language resources on the DoD Plain Language Website are available to action officers who write policy documents.
    - The DoD Plain Language Committee met to discuss implementation of the DoD Plain Writing Act Implementation Plan, DoD Instruction 5025.13, and to share ideas and information.
- Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA)
    - DeCA designated a plain language contact and published the designation on internal directories.
    - DeCA is using DoD action and information memorandums within its headquarters to convey complex information in a clean, simple format that fosters clarity and brevity.
- Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS)
    - DFAS hired a program manager responsible for overseeing its plain language implementation efforts and compliance with the Plain Writing Act.
    - DFAS is developing an official communication plan to publicize the plain language program across the agency. The plan will use DFAS Business Journal articles, a targeted email campaign to key writers and communicators in the agency, training videos, and an online plain language instruction site, among other methods.
    - The DFAS Corporate Communications Office prepares or reviews all official customer communications to make sure that the message being presented is clear and easy to understand. Communications include articles, videos, letters and emails that contain content for public release, web content, and Facebook posts.
    - DFAS launched an online plain language instruction site for agency newsletter editors.
- Defense Security Service (DSS)
    - DSS has established a plain language program and appointed the agency's senior editor as the plain language representative.
    - The DSS plain language representative:
        - Hosted three plain writing workshops for agency personnel.
        - Hosts staffing package editorial reviews by appointment and on a walk-in basis.
    - As part of the plain language program, DSS created the Administrative Resource Center on the DSS intranet. The Center has:

- A comprehensive writing tools section with plain writing reference material, links to DoD and federal government plain writing policy, and two online training modules.
- An "Ask the Editor" feature, where agency personnel can ask questions about grammar, style, and other plain writing topics; browse the section for more information; or search the archives of previous questions.

- Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA)
  - DTRA developed a website for action officers containing examples, reference and training materials, checklists, and templates. The website was designed to be a one-stop shop for editorial and plain language guidance.
  - Information about plain language requirements is advertised on digital signage systems throughout agency workspaces to promote awareness of DoD plain language standards.
  - An integrated process team helps streamline and standardize the DTRA issuance process to make sure it complies with plain language guidance.
  - DTRA holds monthly meetings to solicit feedback and provide updates on plain language requirements.
  - DTRA developed an internal survey to solicit plain language issues, questions, and concerns from employees.

- Department of the Navy. The Navy revised their directives system to incorporate a new, clearer, and more concise format that will be used in all Secretary of the Navy instructions.

- Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Responsive writing instruction will continue to be an integral part of the existing Joint Staff Training Program. The instruction ensures the senior leaders of the Joint Staff receive timely, accurate decision products necessary to perform their advisory and leadership roles and responsibilities.

- Office of the Director of Administration and Management
  - Staff and editors in the Directives Division use plain language guidelines when reviewing and revising publications that establish and implement DoD policy.
  - Plain language is emphasized in DoD issuance process training classes offered to DoD action officers.
  - Facilities Services Directorate front office staff members routinely reference the DoD Manual for Written Material as their authoritative writing guide. The manual includes plain language guidance and concepts.
  - Organizational and Management Planning staff members:
    - Collaborate on written materials so documents are properly formatted in compliance with DoD standards for communications.
    - Have spent a significant amount of time studying the federal plain language website and other sources of information to determine the correct method of implementing the Plain Writing Act in DoD.
    - Were awarded the Secretary of Defense Individual Award for Correspondence Excellence in 2013.
  - Pentagon Force Protection Agency:
    - Tested the DoD-wide plain language training course. Employees who have not completed either of two agency-specific courses will take this course. All new employees will also take the DoD-wide course.
    - The Policy section writes agency regulations and other documents using plain language requirements.

III. Communication of Requirements

Communication about the Act's implementation, plain language guidelines, and compliance requirements is provided to the DoD workforce through:

- Publication of the DoD Plain Writing Act implementation plan, known as DoD Instruction 5025.13. It is available on the DoD Issuances Website at http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives.
- Distribution of memorandums from the Office of Management and Budget and the Office of the Secretary of Defense.
- Meetings of the DoD Plain Language Committee, which consists of representatives from different organizations within the DoD.
- Training and helpful resources available on the DoD Plain Language Website and individual agency websites.
- Notices placed in various public forums such as:
  - DoD newspapers
  - DoD newsletters
  - Mass electronic information systems

IV. Training

- <u>DoD</u>
  - DoD has developed its own online plain language training course. It is currently being tested and will be available on the DoD Plain Language Website by May 2014.
  - DoD organizations that already have internal training available will incorporate plain language guidance in those programs.
  - DoD organizations that do not have internal training will use either the DoD plain language training (when available) or the resources available on the DoD Plain Language Website.
- <u>Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA)</u>
  - DeCA identified approximately 250 headquarters personnel who are interested in taking free, online plain language training developed by the National Institutes of Health and recommended by the DoD Plain Language Program.
  - In 2014, the DeCA plain language contact will begin coordinating training efforts with the agency's Workforce Development Division.
- <u>Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS)</u>
  - DFAS is identifying key positions that should regularly complete plain language training.
  - DFAS offers 15 training courses that contain lessons about plain writing. In 2013, 154 DFAS employees successfully completed one or more of these courses. The Corporate Communications Office trained 20 agency newsletter editors.
  - One DFAS employee is currently training to become a certified plain language trainer. She will complete the certification in early 2014.
- <u>Defense Threat Reduction Agency</u>. Administrative staff and action officers take a training course covering various types of written correspondence. Formal training is held multiple times per week in a classroom setting. Approximately 1800 personnel have attended the training. The training is now offered online as part of the agency's Learning Management System.
- <u>Missile Defense Agency</u>. Training consists of:
  - A two-day internal course on correct writing.

- Individual editing conferences between the senior editor and action officers who are working largely on internal instructions, directives, and manuals.
- Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
  - The Joint Staff Training Program facilitated an active responsive writing program as a part of formal action officer and Division Chief introductory training. The responsive writing point of contact also facilitated formal individual and group training for select Joint Staff personnel.
  - A total of 921 Joint Staff personnel received formal writing instruction.
- Office of the Director of Administration and Management
  - Acquisition Directorate. Thirteen employees have attended a class to improve their writing skills.
  - Directives Division. All nine employees in the Editorial Processing Branch, who review and edit DoD policy and guidance, have completed plain language training.
  - Facilities Services Directorate. Six employees attended the Six Keys to Plain Writing course given by the Human Resources Directorate in 2013.
  - Human Resources Directorate. The Learning and Development Division offered an in-person training class called Six Keys to Plain Writing. The course was taught by an instructor certified through the plainlanguage.gov train-the-trainer initiative. The course covered plain language concepts such as word choice, document organization, active voice, paragraph and section headings, tables, and lists. Twenty-five employees from across the Office of the Secretary of Defense attended the course.
  - Pentagon Force Protection Agency. Offers two instructor-led courses that fulfill plain language requirements – Advanced Report Writing for Officers and FranklinCovey's Writing Advantage.
- Office of the Inspector General of the Department of Defense (OIG)
  - OIG developed a tiered training system for various staff levels.
    - All current senior executive service (SES) officials take one-time 30-minute plain language training. This training will also be provided to newly promoted or hired SES staff. Training consists of OIG-specific information derived from federal guidelines and DoD Instruction 5025.13.
    - Managers and supervisors take one-time 30-minute plain language training. This training will also be provided to newly promoted or hired managers and supervisors. This is the same training that SES officials take. Managers and supervisors also take a one-time OIG-specific plain language course online.
    - Report writers (assessments, inspections, audits, and investigations) take a three-hour, in-person Principles of Plain Language course, taught in-house by OIG plain language certified trainers. Report writers are only required to take the course once but they can take it again as needed for remedial purposes or based on a supervisor's recommendation. This training can be taught by plainlanguage.gov trainers or OIG staff who received the plainlanguage.gov Train the Trainer course. Report writers also take a one-time OIG-specific plain language course online.
    - Editors take:
      - One-time, three-hour, in-person Principles of Plain Language course, taught in-house by OIG plain language certified trainers. This is the same training that the report writers receive.
      - One-time Inspector General e-learning (IGEL) plain language course online.
      - The plainlanguage.gov Train-the–Trainer course. Those taking this course must have leadership approval to give one to two classes outside OIG, which is the purpose of becoming a trainer for plainlanguage.gov. The Basic Plain Language course taught by plainlanguage.gov is a prerequisite.
      - The plainlanguage.gov Plain Language Basic course or other formal training in plain language such as the one-time Plain Language IGEL course online or other courses offered through plainlanguage.gov, if editors feel they need it.
    - Full-time federal employees in the remaining workforce take a one-time plain language IGEL course online.

- Contractors in the remaining workforce can take either the National Institutes of Health online plain language training or the Federal Aviation Administration's Plain Language: The Basics course online.
  - Two OIG writer-editors took the plainlanguage.gov Train the Trainer course in 2013.
- <u>United States Northern Command/North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD)</u>. United States Northern Command and NORAD incorporated plain language training into a mandatory 5-day course for all newly assigned personnel. Since July 2013, 231 personnel have been trained in plain language concepts.

V. Ongoing Compliance/Sustaining Change

The DoD is working towards full compliance with the Act and has fulfilled requirements such as:

- Publishing the DoD Plain Writing Act Implementation Plan, DoD Instruction 5025.13.
- Maintaining the DoD Plain Language Website.
- Designating a senior official for plain language.
- Encouraging feedback from the public and stakeholders to identify communications that require improvements.
- Publishing the annual compliance report on the DoD Plain Language Website.

VI. Website: http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/plainlanguage.html

Information about the Act and its requirements; implementation plans and compliance resources, and compliance reports may be found on the DoD Plain Language Website. The site also provides an easy way for the public to contact the DoD should they have questions or request the revision of documents that are not in plain language. Any input received through the site will be considered and identified documents will be reviewed and revised, if necessary.

VII. Customer Satisfaction

We want your input. Feedback is critical to help us know whether or not we have been successful in providing information that is clear and well-organized, for its intended audience.

Comments, questions, and concerns may be sent to whs.mc-alex.esd.mbx.dod-plain-language@mail.mil.