

The Oath

Federal Employee Oath: I do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter. So help me God.

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Introducing “The Oath”

“The Oath” is a publication of EPA’s 19 Union Locals and Chapters. As Civil Servants we take an Oath to protect the U.S. Constitution, and by extrapolation, to protect our nation and its people from all enemies, foreign and domestic. Legislatively, we as EPA employees are additionally charged to protect the environment and human health. As Civil Servants we must not forget who we work for. The name of this newsletter was voted upon by the Union Presidents and “The Oath” won the vote.

We decided upon a national newsletter for a variety of reasons. For years now, the EPA Coalition of Unions has been working on a number of national issues on behalf of employees. Some recent examples are the political manipulation of science (the Administration ignored the science) behind EPA’s declaration that the smoke from the WTC disaster was safe, insufficient protection of the nation’s most vulnerable populations from organophosphate pesticides, and the closing of the EPA libraries. The coalition has also taken a large number of employee representational issues such as PARS, People Plus, Smart Cards, Principles of Scientific Integrity, and the contracting out EPA jobs.

Many of EPA’s union locals/chapters have newsletters, some do not. This newsletter will, hopefully, be sent out by each local/chapter to their respective bargaining units. This newsletter will inform employees on national issues, progress made by the coalition in fighting for employee interests in these issues, as well as being a progressive sounding board for all EPA

employees. We welcome letters to the editor and even articles from EPA management.

EPA Budget Cuts – Will You Lose Your Job?

By Dwight Welch, National Partnership Council Union Co-Chair

In recent years, under this Administration, EPA's budget has been taking an annual hit of \$200 to \$300 million in reductions. The Agency's annual budgets are down from a high of over \$7 billion. These cuts will probably continue into the near future. So far EPA jobs have been salvaged. The budget cuts were from things like travel, cutting shuttle bus service, closing the libraries. But future cuts might be costing EPA jobs.

Through the National Partnership Council, management has asked the Unions for suggestions as to how to cut the budget further, without the need to RIF any EPA employees. The Union Coalition of Unions is now passing on this request to those who we represent. What can be cut without losing EPA positions?

Now if you are like me, you may be asking, "How about ending the Iraq occupation, \$200 - \$300 million could be saved in a few days to a week." Or "How about the 'Bridge to Nowhere' in Alaska." "\$200 to \$300 million is equal to not cancelling the estate tax; the estate tax of two or three deceased billionaires would cover the shortfall." But no, these type of suggestions are not what are being requested.

One suggestion is to cut the EPA awards program and SES bonuses. According to the former Deputy CFO, Mike Ryan, this is about 2% of EPA's budget and could cancel out the budget shortfall.

This may be your job, so your suggestions are sought. The Unions are your Unions, so participation is in your best interest. Send your suggestions to your local Union President and/or to me the NPC Union Co-Chair, via EPA e-mail to "welch.dwight".

Will the EPA Plan to Digitize Employee Official Personnel Folders Compromise Your Confidentiality?

By Maureen Kiely, AFGE Local 3607

During an EPA Management briefing to all EPA Local Union officials (held on 10/5/06), we learned the following:

* Within the next couple of months, EPA Human Resources offices throughout the Agency will be going through each employee's Official Personnel Folder (OPF), and purging (removing)

items that do not belong in an OPF (as defined by the Office of Personnel Management). EPA Human Resources Offices will notify employees when their purged OPF material has been removed.

* EPA management's original intent (as described in the 7/25/06 written "Notice to the Unions") was to notify employees once, by e-mail, that their purged materials can be picked up in the HR offices. The HR offices will hang on to the material for exactly 30 days after the e-mail notification to employees. After that 30-day time period, HR will throw out all materials that have not been picked up.

* Once the purging is completed, our paper Official Personnel Folders will be boxed up and shipped to Virginia, where an OPM contractor (Anacomp) will scan all of the materials inside, and digitize them, creating an electronic OPF for each employee. Once the digitization is complete, the contractors will re-box the paper OPFs and ship them back to our offices (i.e., their original locations).

* The paper versions of our OPFs will undergo some sort of "quality assurance" check, to make certain that all the necessary documents did, indeed, get scanned. The paper OPFs will remain in the EPA Human Resources local offices for some period of time (that could be up to two years). Then, the paper OPFs will be moved to off-site storage (possibly to the OPM archives; but the precise location has not been definitely decided).

* In the long-term, Human Resources offices will only maintain electronic versions of the OPFs.

*The EPA e-OPFs will actually be "housed" at the Department of Interior's National Business Center in Denver, CO. The Union has been verbally assured that this facility is guarded 24 hours a day, contains "intrusion detection tools" on its e-OPF network, and has a contract with IBM for disaster recovery services. Although the Union received these verbal assurances, we have not actually seen any documentation to back up these assurances.

Is Any EPA Union Bargaining over this issue?

Yes. Both the AFGE Council 238 of Local EPA Unions, and the ESC EPA Unit in San Francisco issued a Demand to Bargain. And the other Unions representing EPA employees are considering issuing their own Demand. Through these e-OPF negotiations, we want to try and ensure two major objectives:

(1) That employees' personal information, such as social security numbers, spouse's social security numbers, insurance beneficiaries, and bank account numbers for direct deposit, remain protected during the conversion process (shipping the boxes, scanning the paper copies, etc.) as well as during the long-term implementation phase.

(2) That all of the important material in the employees' paper Official Personnel Folder are successfully transferred into the electronic format.

It would be helpful to know to what extent this may concern our Bargaining Unit

members; and what your specific concerns are (if any). Please contact your local Union officials if you want to express any concerns.

Union to Bargain Nationally on the EPA Leave Bank

By Dwight Welch, NPC Union Co-Chair

The EPA Coalition of Unions has decided negotiate as a block, rather than individually to work on the procedures to be used to implement a national EPA Leave Bank. Presently, negotiators from each National Union are being selected. (One each from AFGE, NTEU, NAGE, ESC, and NAIL) Be sure to read coming issues of “The Oath” for progress reports on this issue.