Plain Writing Act Compliance Report - July 6, 2011

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2011

U.S. Department of State

I.   Senior Agency Official for Plain Writing:

Name	Email	Phone Number	Location
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II.   Types of communications released in a format that is consistent with Plain Writing Act guidelines:

Type of communications of document or posting. List how this is made available to the public	Who are the intended user and approximate number of potential users?	What has changed by using Plain Writing?
Created Volume 2 of the Foreign Affairs Handbook (2 FAH) to set standards for writing Department of State directives. The 2 FAH is accessible on the Intranet (http://arpsdir.a.state.gov) to over 40,000 global users.	Department of State Employees (40,000) Department Rule Writers (30) Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM) (7) FAM Volume Coordinators, subject matter experts, and writers (32) Standing Committee on Directives (32) Programs Managers (30) Forms Development Program (5) Department Legal Advisers (10)	- FAM information is written in a consistent style. - Information in the FAM is written in a way that makes it easier and more concise for users. - Easier to maintain information in the FAM, because the writing style is the same. - Legal and technical information is clear. - Users save time because they can read it once and follow instructions with ease.
FAM-X Project. The FAM-X project accomplished the redacting of over 35,000 pages of policies. Plain writing was one of the driving factors and guiding principles in rewriting the FAM. The baseline goal was to bring the FAM up to date and make it easier for users to understand. Plain writing materials and guidance can be accessed from the Intranet.	The intended users of the FAM are Department of State employees. As policies and guidance change, the FAM is updated using plain language to ensure the most up-to-date information is available on the Intranet.	Information is presented in a manner that can be understood by all employees worldwide. Writing the FAM in plain language leaves little room for interpreting information incorrectly.
Conducted plain language training	All Department of State employees have	More users are adopting plain

classes in support of the FAM and are still conducted on an as-needed basis. Plain language training material is available on the Intranet (http://arpsdir.a.state.gov).	access to plain language information	language as the standard for writing at the Department of State.
Guidance to Department rule writers on how to implement Executive Order 13563 using plain language.	Thirty rule writers can access pertinent guidance from the Department's Intranet (http://arpsdir.a.state.gov). The public derives the benefits of plain writing as the retrospective review of rules progresses.	Rule makers will adopt the plain writing style and will continue to produce documents that are clear and concise.
Standard Operating Procedures	9 FAM Writers	Consistency in writing style based on SOPs, FAM and writing guide book for the Department
Department Notices and telegrams to the field are written in plain language	Department of State employees, worldwide	Information is presented clearly and in an easy to read manner

III. **Inform agency staff of the Plain Writing Act's requirements:**

   a. Conducted classroom training on plain writing

   b. Disseminated a Department Notice to all domestic and overseas employees

   c. Developed plain writing standard operating procedure guide

   d. Incorporated plain language as part of employee performance standards

   e. Posted plain language reference materials in the Department's Intranet (http://arpsdir.a.state.gov/famx/purposeplainlanguage.html) and Internet (http://www.state.gov/open/index.htm) sites

IV. **Training:**

   a. Collaborated with FAA Trainers to conduct plain language training.

   b. Concurrently, developed and coordinated plain language training for Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM) volume coordinators, FAM analysts and writers, attorneys, and subject matter experts

   c. Developed and conducted office-wide training for rulemaking, forms development, administrative support and information collection personnel

   d. Communicated to employees the availability of plain writing training through www.plainlanguage.gov

e. Developed plain writing standard operating procedure guide

f. Below are the training courses conducted:

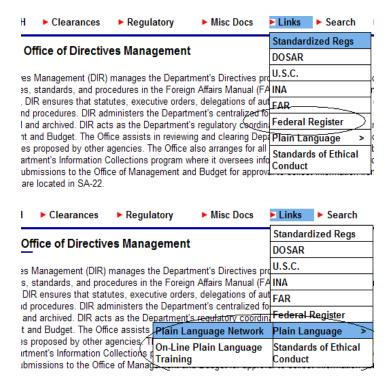| Type of Training	Number of employees trained	Date
Formal Class Room Training	25	February 28, 2004
Formal Class Room Training	22	February 25, 2004
Formal Class Room Training	21	March 3, 2004
Formal Class Room Training	23	March 17, 2004
Formal Class Room Training	25	April 13, 2004
Formal Class Room Training	25	April 27, 2004
Formal Class Room Training	18	January 12, 2005
Formal Class Room Training	15	September 15, 2005
Formal Class Room Training	17	September 16, 2005
Directives Formal Training Course	32	January 14, 2009

V. **Ongoing compliance/ sustaining change:**

a. Incorporating plain writing in standard operating procedures

b. Improving approval process for FAM material not written in plain language

c. Improving clarity of documents written for public consumption

d. Adding links to the Intranet webpage for users to obtain plain writing reference materials

e. Ensuring that employees receive adequate plain language training

f. The Department of State continues to incorporate plain language as part of the FAM update lifecycle and in compliance with Executive Order 13563, Improving Regulation and Regulatory Review

VI. **Agency's plain writing website:**

The Department of State's Intranet provides employees with a rich variety of information sources. One of them is the Directives Management's webpage which includes information and guidelines pertaining to plain writing.

http://arpsdir.a.state.gov

VII. **Customer satisfaction evaluation after experiencing plain writing communications:**

Below is an example of our survey/evaluation sheet from each session:

Summation of Evaluations from 2 FAH-1 Training

QUESTION 1. WHAT PARTS OF THE COURSE CONTENT WERE MOST RELEVANT, INFORMATIVE, AND USEFUL? WHAT COULD WE IMPROVE?

Comments from September 14, 2004

The overall review of 2 FAH-1 contents was very helpful. Keeping the schedule to a ½ day is a good idea—just the right amount of time. Using a few more examples (reviewed and tested in advance) would also help.

The entire course was very informative and useful. As I am nearing completion on several subchapters, the FAM structure, format, and page layout slides were most helpful. Bullets 3 and 4 on slide 13 are still confusing. Bullet 3 said to clean up the "track changes" and comments. Then, bullet 4 says to highlight on drafts submitted to DIR. It is unclear as to what we should be highlighting. Once the track changes are cleared, it seems that highlighting what words, sentences, or sections have changed will increase our administrative work.

Relevant was finding out the reasoning behind the colors, why the structure is in this particular format for the FAM. The Powerpoint handouts are a great reference tool to remind us of our "must haves", remembering the "active voice" and the clearance process.

Make the powerpoint slides available to the Volume Coordinators so that the text can be adapted as "handy" reminders for the SMEs and authors writing and rewriting their sections of the FAM.

I appreciated the re-cap of the highlights of 2 FAH-1 and what DIR considers the most important elements of the handbook to be used for writing and editing the FAMs/FAHs.