

## **Conservation District/NRCS Operational Highlights**

### **Suspension of Outlook Web-Access**

The USDA Chief Information Officer halted all user access to USDA emails through Outlook Web Access in response to ongoing cyber security attacks that threaten USDA information systems. USDA fully recognizes the negative impact that this has on both internal and partner communications.

- Outlook Web Access will not be allowed for both NRCS and partner communications until security concerns can be mitigated.
- NRCS is actively working with USDA to identify secure methods of accessing USDA emails from external networks.

### **HSPD-12 LincPass**

In August 2007, USDA began implementing LincPass, USDA's version of government-wide Personal Identity Verification (PIV) cards. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in turn has issued mandates that require all Federal departments to provide a process for identity proofing and credentialing employees and contractors to increase security of Federal buildings, computers and information systems. This means:

- Physical access to sensitive records will require a background investigation and may require a LincPass if the building uses LincPass controlled entry. Someone entering a field office that has the files properly secured is not considered to have access to the records.
- Electronic access to USDA sensitive records will require a background investigation and a LincPass card.
- Escorted access to a facility does not require a LincPass.
- Unescorted access in mission critical buildings requires a LincPass; however, OMB does not consider Field Service Centers, District offices, and most county offices to be mission critical facilities.

The Non-Employee Identity System (NEIS) became USDA's System of Record for Non-Employee Information required for LincPass enrollment. NEIS enables Conservation District employees to store their identity information such as social security number, full name, date of birth, country of citizenship, home address, business email, business phone, and business office location.

- Enrollment stations for HSPD-12 started in October 2008.
- Activation Lite stations are planned to be deployed later in 2009 to reduce the burden of maintaining an active LincPass.

### **Common Computing Environment**

USDA has recently completed an update to the computer contract that supplies the computers and printers to USDA and requesting Conservation Districts. NRCS personnel will be providing this information to NACD as it is released by ITS.

### **Farm Bill Section 1619 - Information Sharing**

Section 1619 of the Farm Bill restricts the Secretary of Agriculture and its employees from disclosing certain types of information.

- Information provided by a land owner/producer or obtained from the property in order to participate in the USDA programs cannot be disclosed. This includes information about operations, practices, land use, geospatial boundaries of fields and planning units.
- Routine use of information as necessary for the implementation of conservation programs with partners will be facilitated through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). NRCS will coordinate development of a MOU for use with Conservation Districts and other partners. In the interim individual employees will certify their compliance with Section 1619 using a cooperator certification form until the MOUs are in place.
- NRCS continues to work with other USDA Agencies regarding Section 1619 to ensure partner access to information needed to maximize delivery of conservation technical assistance.

### **Seat Management**

Beginning in FY 2009, NRCS began paying a \$3,000 seat management service charge for computer workstations. The Seat Management includes core software (Operating System, Security/Virus Protection, MS Office) along with technical support and assistance.

- The service charge is paid at the national level based on the number of Agency and partner computers in the equipment inventory on May 1, 2008.
- FY 2010 costs will be based inventory on May 1, 2009
- The service charge does not include the replacement of computers. Conservation Districts should work closely with their State Conservationists to ensure that District computers are properly inventoried and kept current with warranty coverage.

### **Security Training**

The Federal Information Security Management Act (FISMA) of 2002 requires security awareness training for all Federal employees, contractors, and partners that have access to government information systems.

- NRCS National Bulletin 270-9-1, IRM requires employees, contractors, and partners to complete mandatory Information Security and Privacy Training by March 31, 2009.
- AgLearn.gov is used to provide and record the FY09 Information Systems Security Awareness training course for all USDA employees, contractors, and partners.
- USDA Chief Information Officer has directed that all users who fail to complete the annual training must have network access removed. There are no exceptions. Employees on extended absence and not using agency information systems, such as sick or military leave, can be given a deadline extension until they return, but only if there names are reported to the State Training Officer.

### **ESRI GIS Software**

USDA renewed the USDA/ESRI GIS Software agreement in early October, 2008. Conservation Districts are full partners with USDA and can receive and use the software.

- Conservation District users do not have to be connected to the USDA network to use ESRI software.
- Steve Webber, NRCS Fort Collins, is the USDA designated Agency Central Support for Conservation Districts and he will be providing guidance on requesting and use of ESRI.