



**Department of the Army (DA),
Employment Policy Division (EPD),
Benefits, Pay & Compensation (BP&C)
Branch Newsletter**

August 2015

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**NEW DA BP&C Branch
Newsletter**

AG1-CP BP&C Branch

Welcome to the new Department of the Army (DA) Benefits, Pay & Compensation (BP&C) Newsletter! The purpose of this newsletter is to provide you with the latest updates regarding Civilian BP&C policies, guidance, and other relevant information. This newsletter is intended to improve engagement between the Commands, Civilian Human Resources Agency, Army Civilians and the AG-1 BP&C Branch regarding Army Civilian benefits, pay and compensation issues, so your suggestions for improvement are encouraged. BP&C-related topics will be brief with relevant links and resources cited for additional information. We will send out a newsletter at least once a quarter and possibly more frequently if needed.

Welcome Aboard –

By Pamela Sokol

BP&C Branch is pleased to announce Mr. Tony Lawrence joined our team as our Worker's Compensation Program Manager on 29 June 2015. Mr. Lawrence brings experience and a proven track record of success as an HR Specialist along with his specialized experience and knowledge in Workers Compensation.

ECOMP

By Jeannie Davis

ECOMP is the Department of Labor's Employees' Compensation Operations and Management Portal. It is a web-based processing tool that will replace the Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) feature in Defense Injury and Unemployment Compensation System, which is currently in use for all of Department of Defense. ECOMP is expected to be more efficient; it should result in faster processing of claims, and will provide the ability to upload important documentation by all users. Employees will be able to file a workers' compensation claim from any computer connected to the internet. The claim will flow to the first-line supervisor, the supervisor will review and add additional information if necessary, and then submit the claim electronically to the Injury Compensation Specialist (ICS) in the same way as is done with the current EDI process. Like EDI, ECOMP will also allow the ICS to file a claim for an employee who does not have access to the internet or is unable to file a claim him/herself. A group of testers from across the Army has completed testing and informational materials are being developed. Commands will be asked to assist in system deployment by ensuring employees and supervisors take the on-line training offered by DoL on the ECOMP web page (www.ecomp.dol.gov). ECOMP is tentatively scheduled to launch for Army users 1 September, 2015.

Changes to FERS Contribution Rates for FY16

By Sandra Howard-Pleasants

Changes to FERS Contribution Rates for Fiscal Year 2016, is now available at

<http://www.opm.gov/retirement-services/publications-forms/benefits-administration-letters/>.

New employer contribution rates will become effective with the first pay period beginning on or after 1 October 2015.

Information for Installation/Depot CSRs and Timekeepers

By Pamela Sokol

Per the Time and Attendance User's Manual, a P code used in the work schedule means "Pending Separation". The P may be sent by the employing activity prior to receiving the SF50 to preclude requesting T&A to be reported and paid. If the employee status code is P, no future schedule may be input after the effective date of the P.

When you should use the P: If an employee is separating or transferring to an agency outside of the database they are currently in, you may input a P in the work schedule. This code can reasonably be used as you are waiting on HR to input the appropriate action into the database. Before using this code, please ensure you are confident the employee should not get paid for future pay periods by your employing agency. If the employee is a transfer, ensure the P status is input for the day before the employee is picked up by the new activity. For example, if the employee starts the new position on Sunday, the P should be input for Saturday, even if the last day of actual work was Friday.

When you should NOT input a P in the work schedule:

If an employee is on Leave Without Pay (LWOP) or Military Furlough, do not use the P as time still needs to be entered into the system. You should not input a P if an employee is intermittent.

Living Quarters Allowance (LQA): Implementation of Department of Defense Advisory, Definition of U.S. Hire

By Pamela Sokol

Effective 7 April 2015 the Office of the Assistant G-1 for Civilian Personnel prepared a memorandum rescinding Army's memorandum implementing the Department of Defense Advisory, Definition of U.S. Hire dated 19 September 2013.

The information in our earlier memorandum required correction in light of current Department of State Standardized Regulations (DSSR) and further guidance contained in the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) compensation claim decisions.

The DSSR and OPM decisions specifically address employee eligibility to receive Living Quarters Allowance (LQA). DSSR, Section 031.11 provides: "Quarters allowances . . . may be granted to employees who were "recruited" by the employing government agency in the United States, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and the possessions of the United States." DSSR, Section 031.12 addresses employees recruited outside the United States; LQA is available to employees recruited outside the United States only within Section 031.12's very narrow parameters. **Any implementing guidance cannot broaden or increase these DSSR entitlements.**

Actual LQA eligibility must be determined based on guidance contained in the DSSR, the DoDI 1400.25-Volume 1250, Overseas Allowances and Differentials dated 23 February 2012, (reference: definition of US hire), and previously rendered OPM LQA compensation claim decisions.

Army is working with the Department of Defense (DoD) to seek revision of the current DSSR regulation to allow for certain temporary absences from the U.S. for reasons such as temporary duty assignments, vacations, and deployments; this addition would not disqualify a person from "U.S. hire" status when determining eligibility for LQA. **However, until such time, Army may not extend benefits that are not otherwise permitted by the DSSR.**

Living Quarters Allowance (LQA) and Initial Reconciliation:

By Pamela Sokol

LQA rates are designed to cover an employee's average costs for rent, heat, light, fuel, gas, electricity, and water; LQA is not designed to cover 100 percent of the employee's costs.

For locations where LQA reconciliation is required, employees are **CAUTIONED** when submitting written estimates of costs (utility costs), or actual costs if they are known (such as lease agreement), when submitting an LQA Annual/Interim Expenditures Worksheet (attached to the SF-1190, Foreign Allowances Application, Grant, and Report), to the servicing Civilian Personnel Advisory Center (CPAC).

Employees should be counselled:

- Reconciliation is required for LQA recipients 12 – 15 months upon moving into a new residence; LQA records are subject to audit at any time to determine if reimbursements match actual expenses;
- An **OVER ESTIMATION** (by the employee) of utility costs (such as electricity, water, garbage collection, etc.) may result in an overpayment to the government after completion of the employees reconciliation;
- To avoid under- or over-payments, employees are required to maintain accurate records of expenses; periodically review their Leave and Earning Statements; and retain all receipts;
- The purpose of requesting and or requiring a reconciliation of LQA expenses is to correct any unusual monetary gains or losses to the employee; if an overpayment of LQA occurs, DFAS will collect the overpayment;
- LQA monies converted into foreign currency will fluctuate based on the foreign currency exchange rate used by DFAS, and foreign currency exchange rates used by the local banking facilities.

LQA payments are "estimates of housing expenses", and are subject to reconciliation at the end of the LQA period. Reconciliation overpayments are generally not eligible for waiver consideration because they do not constitute erroneous payments;

Mandatory Use of Defense Travel System (DTS)/Commercial Travel Office (CTO) for Lodging Reservations

By Gary Buck

For all locations which DoD has fielded DTS; DTS shall be used to process authorizations, vouchers for TDY, and vouchers for local travel. The reservations module of DTS (works through a DTMO-contracted CTO) should be used to make all commercial lodging and transportation reservations, as well as Gov't Quarters reservations when that functionality is available in DTS. Organizations must require that, through DTS, the CTO arrange commercial lodging and transportation IAW applicable laws, Gov't policies, agreements, and contracted rates using U.S.-certificated carriers and economy/coach-class accommodations, whenever possible along usually travelled routes.

When DTS is not available, or commercial lodging at the TDY location cannot be found in DTS, the CTO may be contacted directly to arrange commercial travel.

If DTS and/or the CTO is available and the traveler does not use it to make lodging reservations, reimbursement for the lodging is limited to the amount the Gov't would have paid if the arrangements had been made directly through a CTO.

This change will appear in JTR Update effective 1 SEP 2015. Though it will be effective 1 Sep 15 for non-bargaining employees', please ensure you and your service managers fulfill your labor obligations prior to implementing any change in bargaining unit employees' working conditions.

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