

# Plain Writing Act Compliance Report — April 12, 2013

This report outlines the progress towards implementing the Plain Writing Act of 2010 within the Department of Defense. Please check back for updates.

## I. Senior Agency Official

Michael L. Rhodes, Director of Administration and Management, is the Senior Official for plain language and will lead our efforts towards compliance with the Act. Oversight of implementation and administration of the DoD Plain Language Program is handled by the Washington Headquarters Services, Directives Division through the plain language point of contact, who may be contacted at DoDPlainLanguage@whs.mil.

## II. Using Plain Language

DoD received two plain language amendment requests in 2012.

- An amendment request was sent to Army on August 22, 2012 concerning two documents, a public notice and a prospectus, relating to a US Army Corps of Engineers project. The requester asked that the documents be rewritten in accordance with plain language standards. Army responded on September 21, 2012.
  - Army acknowledged that the Corps should have written the public notice in accordance with plain language standards. However, it was not possible to rewrite it at that time because the notice had expired on July 25 and the requester's notice was received after that date.
  - Army stated that the Corps could not rewrite the prospectus since it was not written by the Corps. The prospectus was written by a company representing another company that was proposing an agreement with the Corps regarding environmental restoration. The Army gave the requester the contact information for the company that wrote the prospectus and recommended the requester contact that company to request clarification.
  - The Army stated that they will strive to better comply with plain language requirements when writing documents in the future.
- An amendment request was sent to Joint Staff on October 3, 2012 by a DoD employee concerning the Defense Transportation Regulations. The requester asked that the regulations be rewritten in accordance with plain language standards. As this is not a request from the public, it is being handled internally.

DoD agencies took many actions to implement plain language requirements in 2012.

- Directives Division
  - Staff and editors use plain language guidelines when reviewing and revising publications that establish and implement DoD policy.
  - Writing style guides and plain language resources on the DoD Plain Language Website are offered to action officers that write policy documents.
  - Plain language is emphasized in training classes offered to DoD action officers and the link to the Plain Language Guidelines is provided in class and on the DoD Plain Language Website.
- Air Force
  - Air Force uses three documents to provide information, direction, and instruction to personnel concerning plain language requirements.
    - Air Force Manual 33-326, "Preparing Official Communications," directs personnel to use plain language for all correspondence and includes basic techniques for plain writing.

- Air Force Handbook 33-337, “The Tongue and Quill,” further stresses the use of plain language. The handbook provides formats and templates for a number of different reports, papers, etc. The handbook is widely used by military and civilian personnel, and professional military school educators and students. The handbook facilitates the dissemination of a plain language approach in all types of written communications across the Air Force.
- Air Force Instruction 33-360, “Publications and Forms Management,” directs personnel to use plain language in all official Air Force publications. Specifically, the instruction directs personnel to use the guidelines on the Plain Language website at <http://www.plainlanguage.gov> when drafting publications.
- Defense Contract Audit Agency
  - The Defense Contract Audit Institute is the training arm of the Defense Contract Audit Agency (DCAA). The Institute provides courses to DCAA personnel concerning writing and plain language. The Institute recently expanded its course offerings related to writing. They offer a self-study course on effective grammar as well as a course on effective report writing. They also stress clear, plain writing in several other developmental courses for the audit staff. The Institute provides some level of plain writing training to all auditors, who make up more than 80 percent of DCAA staff and who write audit reports on a regular basis.
- Missile Defense Agency (MDA)
  - MDA offers a course titled “Writing the MDA Way”. It is a two-day course covering the Plain Writing Act, plain language principles and tools, other clear-writing techniques, grammar and punctuation, governing references, and DoD initiatives. Students work through exercises and edit and rewrite sample DoD and MDA documents. The course debuted in January 2012 and, so far, 142 MDA staffers have been trained. It is quite popular among MDA staffers. Classes always fill very quickly.
  - MDA also offers a compressed version of the “Writing the MDA Way” course, which they gave to 13 staff members of the Defense Standardization and Program Office. They also gave it to the Army Publishing Directorate, training 101 APD staffers as well as 14 representatives of APD senior management.
  - Feedback from students has been very positive.
- National Security Agency (NSA)
  - NSA offers three core courses to any NSA employee who needs to communicate more effectively in writing.
    - The seminar “Writing to the Point” builds on basic writing skills and emphasizes the identification of a specific readership and purpose behind a student’s writing. Students learn how to plan and edit their documents and to write tight, economical, and logically constructed paragraphs that support a document’s main points. In 2012, 177 students completed this course.
    - The Paragraph Writing Workshop surveys the essential concepts of good writing and students practice both writing and editing during the course. Students learn how to write sentences that are structurally sound and free of jargon and how to compose effective paragraphs. In 2012, 630 students completed this course.
    - The course “Effective Writing” provides writing practice to students. Students write rhetorical pieces, agency-specific documents, and a documented essay. Students learn how to apply strong sentence and paragraph structures to longer pieces of writing. In 2012, 35 students completed this course.
  - NSA’s Associate Directorate for Education and Training (ADET) also offers courses through their web-based delivery system. These courses stress clarity and effectiveness in writing. In 2012, 72 students completed these courses.
  - ADET is developing a writing placement test. The test will be part of the hiring process. They expect this test to be released in fiscal year 2014. The test will have a multiple-choice part and a part in which applicants provide a writing sample.

- Army
  - Army has incorporated plain language requirements into Army Regulation 25-50, “Managing Correspondence,” and Army Regulation 25-30, “The Army Publications Process.” They are training their editors and setting up a network of plain language points of contact to support the editors as they implement plain language requirements. Army’s Training and Doctrine Command provides plain language training across the Army including providing it as part of Soldier and Leader training.
- Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence (OUSDI)
  - OUSDI distributes information on the Plain Writing Act to senior leaders and action officers as part of their quarterly Policy Review Board meeting. This includes publicizing the DoD Plain Language Website.
  - They encourage action officers to take plain language courses and to visit the DoD Plain Language Website for additional information.
  - They also conduct staff reviews of proposed DoD issuances for content and plain language use before they enter the DoD issuance process.
  - These efforts have improved the readability of DoD issuances originating in OUSDI and simplified staff packages. As a result, fewer packages are returned for correction.
- National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA)
  - NGA established a plain language working group, made up of representatives from across NGA. The group will coordinate NGA compliance with the DoD Plain Writing Act implementation plan. NGA is also changing its culture to one that values and promotes clear and concise writing.
  - Thirty percent of NGA’s organizational components created and distributed guidance in the form of style guides, templates, checklists, etc. to educate and standardize plain writing concepts in their components.
  - NGA provided training to 1,286 students in 9 courses concerning various aspects of writing.
  - NGA components sponsored formal and informal training sessions to educate employees about plain language requirements. These courses include Congressional and budget writing courses, which were attended by more than 750 employees, and the Staff Officer Course, which more than 100 employees attended.
  - NGA’s analysis directorate implemented an Analytic Writing Campaign, targeted to geospatial intelligence analysts and managers, that uses workshops, brown bag events, web pages, and other forums to discuss monthly themes on quality writing.
- Defense Logistics Agency (DLA)
  - DLA will publish a policy instruction to complement the DoD Plain Writing Act implementation plan. This instruction will describe DLA’s internal controls for complying with the Plain Writing Act. For example, DLA staff will be required to verify on document coordination records and summary sheets that the document complies with the Plain Writing Act.
  - DLA is implementing a formal plain language training course. All DLA employees who perform administrative and management functions will be encouraged to take the training. DLA currently has 6 writing courses that address plain language concepts.
  - DLA also conducts a monthly training course for representatives and action officers who write DoD policy instructions. The course informs students about plain language requirements and highlights courses available through the DLA Learning Management System.
- Defense Security Service (DSS)
  - DSS has an online training course that allows employees to learn how to write clearly and concisely by using short, familiar words, specific language, and best practices for organizing content.
  - DSS also devotes a portion of its intranet home page to plain writing resources, including online training. In 2012, DSS hosted 2 plain language training classes at their headquarters and

conducted several ad hoc sessions with agency administrators and action officers on plain writing principles.

### **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 with representatives from different organizations within the DoD.
- Training and helpful resources available on the DoD Plain Language Website.
- Notices placed in various public forums such as:
  - DoD newspapers
  - DoD newsletters
  - Mass electronic information systems

### **IV. Training**

DoD employees who regularly write or edit documents are required to take plain language training.

- 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 the resources available on the DoD Plain Language Website.

### **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 [DoDPlainLanguage@whs.mil](mailto:DoDPlainLanguage@whs.mil).