

Matthews, Diane

From: Soil & Water Conservation Program
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To: Soil & Water Conservation Program; DNR.Soil and Water Conservation Districts staff
Cc: DNR.SWC Staff
Subject: Partner Updates
Attachments: Talking points about vaccine mandate for employees and contractors 091321.docx

All,

Please find below information and attachment that program office received from Scott Edwards, NRCS State Conservationist regarding vaccination requirements for federal employees and contractors. Please keep in mind that guidance is still being developed on a daily basis. We will be diligent as possible in sending updates. Also see below and update on NRCS staffing. Thank You.

SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION PROGRAM

Purpose: Sharing information to keep you in the loop in an ever changing conservation landscape.

Good Morning Missouri Conservationist,

All employees received the announcement from the Office of the Secretary that an Executive Order was signed by the President mandating all federal employees to get vaccinated. At this time, we are waiting on guidance from the Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) mission area under the Department who will inform NRCS how this is going to be implemented. The attached word document has talking points and key dates to help us understand how this new mandate will be implemented. Official guidance is forthcoming and will be distributed to all NRCS and Partner Employees.

Key Points:

- Agencies must work expeditiously to facilitate their employees becoming fully vaccinated as quickly as possible and by no later than November 22, 2021.
- As authorized by law, employees may request reasonable and religious accommodations. The Department of Justice and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission plan to provide further guidance on accommodations the week of September 20, 2021. USDA will then issue further guidance on the process
- By September 24, the Task Force will issue guidance on workplace safety protocols that will be required of contractors and subcontractors.

Retirements and Acting Announcements

Missouri NRCS will lose 90 plus years of conservation experience when Darin Gant, James Hunt and Leslie Michaels retire on September 25! Each have made a significant contribution to the agency and their impact on producers and employees is immeasurable. We have made the selections for all acting positions and they will start this week so there can be an overlap to pass the torch.

- Heath Robertson will be Acting Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations for Area 3
- Dana Seibel will be Acting District Conservationist behind James in FOSA 3b
- Nancy Walker will be Acting District Conservationist behind Darin in FOSA 3f

Mental Health and Employee Well Being

I recently heard a presentation by Doris Kearns Goodwin on the importance of relaxing and recharging. Ms. Goodwin is a presidential historian, who often discusses how we can use historical leadership styles and techniques to address current modern day issues. In this most recent presentation, she discusses how Teddy Roosevelt, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln all found time to relax and recharge even during the Civil War and World Wars.

To adequately replenish and refresh you must first *Set Boundaries*. It is not sustainable nor is it healthy to try and stay engaged 24 hours a day. You must be willing to set boundaries to maintain meaningful work balance. If you are constantly engaged and communicating about work during your off hours then you cannot truly refresh and recharge. For this to work across the agency then we all must be willing to acknowledge and honor your coworkers boundaries. Sending just one more email in the evening or making one quick call has a ripple effect across the workforce. Ask yourself, is this truly an emergency or can it wait until tomorrow before breaking those boundaries.

Here are a few quick tips that I try to use:

- At some point in every day find time to move. Even if its just for a moment, get up and move away from the computer or work desk. Even better find some time to move outside. Fresh air, sunlight and movement have an amazing impact on your well being each and every day.
- Once a week find 2 hours of uninterrupted time for a deep dive into a work project. No meetings, no phone calls, no emails and no texting during this 2 hour period. Mark the time on your schedule and go for a deep dive into what ever major project or work item you must finish this week.
- Find some time to be social and communicate with others about any subject but work. Having a light hearted conversation about any topic other than work can refresh your mental spirit and help take some stress away.

Finally, take some time off and truly unplug. Take a full day away from the office and trust those at work to handle it. No matter what it is they can handle it. Use your leave without felling any guilt, you earned it so use it.

Suicide Prevention and Awareness Resources

September is National Suicide Prevention Month, and sadly, suicide continues to be one of the leading causes of death in America. There are many resources out there to help, and they're readily available, but one of the most useful can be just having a friend or family member who knows the signs and symptoms and can reach out. For a person contemplating suicide, loneliness can be a big contributing factor. Knowing there's someone out there who cares and who's willing to talk and listen – even just asking someone “how are you doing today?” and really listening – can make a significant difference. And that's why spreading awareness of valuable information, resources, and support such as the Employee Assistance Program and the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is so important. No one has to suffer alone or in silence. [To learn more, visit the Mental Health page on myFPAC.](#)

Link to FPAC mental health/suicide awareness webpages: https://myfpac.usda.gov/business-center/human-resources-division/workforce-operations-branch/mental-health/index.html?utm_content=fpacunpackedissue93&utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery

Staff Updates

State Office

Position Change:

Andrew Rackers, from Agriculture Engineer to State Conservation Engineer

Drew Humphreys, from Resource Conservationist, Richmond FO to Financial Resource Specialist, State Office

Loss:

Theresa Sheehan, Financial Resource Specialist

Sonja Williams, Management Analyst

Area 1

New:

Eric Morgan, Soil Conservationist, Platte City FO
Ariel Propes, Soil Conservation Technician, Plattsburg FO
Tyler Cooper, Natural Sciences Specialist, Bethany FO
Sydney Bailey, Soil Conservationist, Kingston FO
Logan Baum, Soil Conservation Technician, St. Joseph FO
Riley Hill, Soil Conservation Technician, Warrensburg FO

Position Change:

Jamie Bokern, from Soil Conservationist, Harrisonville FO to Resource Conservationist, Clinton FO
Katie Clapp, from Soil Conservationist, Sedalia FO to Resource Conservationist, Kahoka FO

Acting:

Ryan Peck, Acting Area Resource Conservationist, St. Joseph (starting June 21)
Kevin Ricke, Acting Resource Conservationist, Sedalia FO (starting July 4)

Loss:

Penny Findley, Area Soil Conservation Technician, Kingston FO
Deanna Brennecke, Area Program Support Specialist, Bethany FO

Area 2

New:

Tommy Ketchum, District Conservationist, Memphis FO
Eric Hogan, Soil Conservationist, Monticello FO (starting September 12)
Rebecca Crawford, Soil Conservation Technician, Edina FO (starting August 29)
Stanley Bell, Natural Resources Specialist (401 Biologist), Kahoka FO (starting November 7)
Katherine Cruse, Soil Conservationist, Moberly FO (September 12)
Sierra Halstead, Soil Conservationist, Mexico FO (October 10)

Position Change:

Joshua Stewart, from Resource Conservationist, Fulton FO to District Conservationist, Palmyra FO
Lauren Stamp, from Soil Conservationist, Montgomery City FO to Resource Conservationist, Bowling Green FO
Kim Schroeder, from Resource Conservationist, Kahoka FO to Resource Conservationist, Montgomery City FO
Grant Phillips, from Soil Conservationist, Kirksville FO to Area Business Tools Specialist, Kirksville FO
Katie Clapp, from Soil Conservationist, Sedalia FO to Resource Conservationist, Kahoka FO
Megan Brown, Converted Pathway Student to a Soil Conservationist, Owensville FO

Acting:

Travis Dinsdale, Area 1 Biologist will assist as Acting Area Biologist in Area 2 until the position gets filled

Loss:

Linda Shumate, Soil Conservation Technician, Memphis FO (June 23rd)

Area 3

New:

Elizabeth Hawkins – Soil Conservationist, Jackson FO (June 14)
Jessica Naeger – Soil Conservation Technician, Perryville FO (August 2)
Lisa Pridemore – Program Support Specialist (PSS), Dexter (August 30)
Nick McCollough – Soil Conservationist – Dexter, (August 30)

Loss:

Darin Gant, District Conservationist
James Hunt, District Conservationist
Leslie Michael, Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations

Area 4

New:

Jacoby Osborn, Soil Conservationist, Stockton FO
Joshua Miller, Soil Conservationist, Butler FO
Hayleigh Ankrom, Soil Conservationist, Lamar FO
Cheyenne Boutin, Soil Conservationist, Buffalo FO
Amanda Blanchard, Program Support Specialist, Nevada FO
Conaley Aaron, Program Support Specialist, Greenfield FO

Position Change:

Rusty Roach, from Soil Conservationist, Hermitage FO to Resource Conservationist, Osceola FO
Nathan Bilke, from District Conservationist, Rolla FO to District Conservationist, Mt. Vernon FO

Acting:

Stacie Mannis, Resource Conservationist, to Acting District Conservationist, Rolla FO

Loss:

Jeffrey Woodward, Resource Conservationist, Stockton FO
Erin Assenmacher, AAC, Springfield AO
Roger Shanks, Soil Con Tech, Houston FO

Quote of the Week

"If you don't like something, change it. If you can't change it, change your attitude." -Maya Angelou

Scott D. Edwards

State Conservationist

USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service

601 Business Loop, 70 West, Suite 250
Columbia, MO 65203

📞 **Office:** (573) 876-0909

📞 **Cell:** (573) 514-5160

✉ **Email:** scott.edwards@usda.gov

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Talking points about vaccine mandate for employees and contractors

- On Thursday (9/9), the President announced a [six-pronged approach](#) to help combat the pandemic. The plan focuses on:
 1. Getting more people vaccinated
 2. Preparing for boosters
 3. Keeping kids safe and in school
 4. Increasing testing and masking
 5. Protecting our economy
 6. Strengthening our surge response
- Most directly relevant to the federal workforce, the President signed an Executive Order that requires all federal executive branch employees to be vaccinated, and another Executive Order that will require federal contractors to do the same.
- **Key points on the new [Executive Order](#) for employees which requires Federal Executive Branch employees to be vaccinated:**
 - Federal Executive Branch employees must be fully vaccinated regardless of whether they work on-site or are remote employees. Therefore, this policy includes those on mandatory telework and in remote work positions. It also does not depend on where an employee's duty station is located.
 - As authorized by law, employees may request reasonable and religious accommodations. The Department of Justice and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission plan to provide further guidance on accommodations the week of September 20, 2021. USDA will provide guidance in accordance with the information we receive from DOJ and EEOC.
 - Agencies must work expeditiously to facilitate their employees becoming fully vaccinated as quickly as possible and by no later than November 22, 2021. Fully vaccinated means at least 2 weeks past the final vaccine dose (which means two doses for Pfizer or Moderna or one dose for Johnson & Johnson).
 - At USDA, we will be flexible in providing employees administrative leave to receive the vaccine as well as if they should experience side effects. At this point, this policy does not address any questions regarding third shots or boosters. With Government-wide adoption and implementation of these vaccination requirements, agencies are no longer required to establish a screening testing program for employees or onsite contractor employees who are not fully vaccinated, although they may elect to do so.
 - As soon as this week, the Workplace Safety Task Force (Task Force) expects to issue additional implementation guidance for agencies to support agency implementation of the vaccination requirement across the Federal workforce. Based on that guidance, our vaccine attestation approach may evolve to include requiring proof of vaccination.

Key points on the new [Executive Order](#) for employees of most contractors that do business with the Federal Government.

- The order ensures that the parties that contract with the Federal Government provide adequate COVID-19 safeguards to their workers performing on or in connection with a Federal Government contract or contract-like instrument, through inclusion in the contract or contract-like instrument of a clause that the contractor and any subcontractors (at any tier) will incorporate into lower-tier subcontracts.
- Until further notice, we are to continue the checking of vaccine certification for contractors and visitors.
- Prior to being contractually required to be vaccinated, onsite contractor employees who are not fully vaccinated and are not part of an agency testing program, must provide proof of a negative COVID-19 test from no later than the previous 3 days prior to entry to a Federal building.
- By September 24, the Task Force will issue guidance on workplace safety protocols that will be required of contractors and subcontractors. As will be covered in more detail in the forthcoming guidance:

- As the President mentioned in his remarks last Thursday, those protocols will include a requirement for vaccination among covered Federal contractor employees.
- Covered contractor employees will also have to comply with the Task Force's requirements related to masking and physical distancing while in covered worksites.
- Covered contractors will need to designate a person or persons to coordinate COVID-19 workplace safety efforts at covered worksites.
- By October 8, the Federal Acquisition Regulatory (FAR) Council will take initial steps to implement appropriate policy direction to agency acquisition offices, through a deviation process as laid out in FAR Subpart 1.4.
- The order applies to: new contracts and new contract-like instruments for services, construction, leasehold interest in real property, or concessions; new solicitations for such contracts or contract-like instruments; extensions or renewals of existing such contracts or contract-like instruments; and exercises of options on existing such contracts or contract-like instruments, where the relevant on or after October 15.
- Further definitions as to the worksite locations in which this requirement will apply to contractors, etc., will be forthcoming from the Task Force.
- With respect to contract-like instruments such as concessions, cooperative agreements, permits, etc., further guidance will be forthcoming from the Task Force and OMB offices.
- The order does not apply to: grants; contracts or subcontracts with a value equal to or less than the simplified acquisition threshold of \$250,000; contracts, contract-like instruments, or agreements with Indian Tribes under the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (P.L. 93-638), as amended; contractor employees who perform work outside the United States or its outlying areas; or contracts, contract-like instruments, or subcontracts solely for the provision of goods.
- **Key points on vaccine effectiveness**
 - Vaccines are safe, easy, and free—and FDA approved or authorized.
 - The health and safety of the millions of Federal workers across the country is paramount to the Administration's decision-making related to workplace safety protocols.
 - As a model employer, we must use the most effective tool in our toolkit for protecting them and their loved ones.