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SAFETY AND HEALTH

Section Overview: Upon completion of this section, you will have an awareness of many aspects related to safety of our employees and equipment, reporting incidents, illnesses, and even fatalities. You will learn where to go for information regarding workplace violence. You will also learn of NRCS requirements for Emergency Preparedness and Continuity of Operation Plans in the event of a natural or man-made disaster.

From GM360.420 http://policy.nrcs.usda.gov/RollupViewer.aspx?hid=17061

Accident and Incident Reporting:

On-The-Job Injury:

Each employee is responsible for reporting job-related injuries to their supervisor as soon as possible. Supervisors are to assist employees in completing necessary forms in a timely manner and forward completed forms to their appropriate Assistant State Conservationist (ASTC) or State Conservationist (STC). To report an injury and claim continuation of pay (if needed), Form CA-1 (Notice of Traumatic Injury) must be completed by the employee and his/her supervisor then forwarded to the ASTC or STC. This form can be obtained from www.dol.gov/esa or your administrative staff. Form CA-16 is used to authorize medical treatment.

Emergency medical treatment may be obtained without prior authorization. Preferably, Form CA-16 (Authorization for Examination and/or Treatment) should be completed before medical treatment is sought. The employee is to bring the original form to the medical facility, or send the CA-16 to the medical facility within 48 hours of treatment for completion. OWCP (Office of Workers' Compensation Programs) will determine payment of medical costs based on the authority in the CA-16. The CA-16 is not available on the Department of Labor website. It can be obtained from your administrative staff.

The CA-1 goes to the OWCP office of the Department of Labor if the injury is traumatic or to the local NRCS file if not.

On-the-Job Illness:

An NRCS employee must report an occupational illness on Form CA-2 within 30 days after becoming aware of the illness if it results in disability for longer than the day or shift during which the illness occurred, prolonged treatment, permanent disability, serious disfigurement of the head or neck or a charge for medical or other expense resulting from a systemic infection, continued or repeated stress or strain, or continued exposure to toxic substance or fumes.

Reporting Fatalities:

The supervisor or manager should immediately report an on-the-job fatality to the appropriate STC or SAO by telephone. The SAO will then report the fatality by telephone to the NRCS Safety and Health Officer.

The AO will call a board of inquiry to investigate the fatality, as described in GM 360.420.27.

Government Vehicle Accidents:

Employees involved in government vehicle accidents are responsible for immediately notifying their supervisor, the appropriate STC or ASTC at the State office, and state, local or municipal law enforcement authorities. If an employee is injured, he/she should to follow the guidance listed above for reporting and obtaining medical treatment in addition to procedures for reporting motor vehicle accidents.

The vehicle operator is to obtain and record all information pertaining to the accident or incident on SF-91 (Operator's Report of Motor Vehicle Accident) and, if appropriate, SF-94 (Statement of Witness). All government-owned and leased vehicles are required to carry these forms in the vehicle at all times. Photographs are desirable but not mandatory. Completed forms are to be forwarded to appropriate supervisor within 10 days of the incident.

Reporting Property Damage:

A property damage incident is one that occurs in the course of a USDA official activity, and results in damage to any property, including motor vehicles as described in section 420.25 (d) and (e) of this amendment. If the property damage incident amounts to $350 or more use AD-872 for incident reporting purposes. Follow the procedures outlined in Title 120 for Administrative Services requirements.

Employees are to report property damage to their supervisors as soon as practical after the incident. Supervisors are to report property damage incidents to their administrative officer as required by Title 120 or by this Amendment. In addition, Form AD-872 (Property Damage Incident Report) is to be completed and a photocopy of the AD-872 should then be sent to the National Headquarters Safety Manager for entry of the information into the Incident Reporting System.

Safety and Health/Accident Review Committees:

Each State is to maintain an ad hoc Safety and Health/Accident Review Committee. In the event of an incident involving government or personal property damage, the Review Committee Officer will make a report of information submitted (Forms SF-91, SF-94, police report, photographs, etc.) and forward findings and forms to the STC for review. The STC will determine if the committee

should be convened to review the accident report and make recommendations related to preventability, pecuniary (financial) liability, and disciplinary action, as appropriate.

Board of Inquiry for Serious Incidents:

A board of inquiry consisting of the State Conservationist, or the Director of the National Technical Center (as appropriate), and the local safety officer (commonly the SAO) investigates the causes of each serious incident and recommends actions to prevent similar occurrences. A serious incident is one that results in

- A fatality
- Hospitalization of five or more people
- Property damage over $100,000

A board of inquiry should investigate any serious incident even if there is doubt that it is job related. Within 2 working days of the incident, the SAO must submit the board's initial findings to the NRCS safety and health manager. This initial report should consist of

- Date and time of the incident
- Location of the incident
- Names of people involved
- A description of the nature and extent of injury, illness, or damage
- A description of any property involved
- Name and telephone number of a local contact person
- A summary of known or suspected causes
- Corrective actions taken or planned

Within 7 working days after the initial report, the AO must submit the board's final report. This report will include CA-6, AD-872 or any other appropriate forms used for the Incident Reporting System and for OWCP. The information will be entered into the Incident Reporting System by the National Headquarters Safety Manager.

Working In Hazardous Conditions Or With Hazardous Materials

State Conservationists and NTC directors are to establish a Hazard Communication Program to inform NRCS employees of the potential physical and health hazards that may result from exposure to chemical and biological agents in USDA work environments.

Hazard Communication Program information must be provided to NRCS employees so that they can make appropriate use and interpretation of hazard warning labels, material safety data sheets, and employee training programs.

Items for protecting employees (including volunteers) from hazardous materials or conditions can be purchased with program funds (i.e. special footwear or clothing if conditions warrant, hard hats, sunscreen and insect repellent) All such property, however, remains in the possession of the federal government. See GM 120.406.61 - Specific Purchase Items. http://policy.nrcs.usda.gov/viewerFS.aspx?id=605

Follow up questions:

1. What precautions do you require of employees who may be visiting different farms on the same day (i.e. biosecurity)?

SAFETY TRAINING

First Aid and CPR – while these are not a USDA or NRCS requirement, consideration for providing this training should be given, especially for employees with field duties.

Defensive Driving – even though not a USDA or NRCS requirement, consideration for providing this training should be given, especially for employees who operate government vehicles, even incidentally.

ATV or Boat Safe Operation (where appropriate)

AgLearn has 84 individual safety courses currently listed in the catalog, including refreshers on First Aid, CPR, and Defensive Driving.

NRCS policy and procedures manual for safety operations within the agency can be found in the General Manual 360.420. The link is: http://directives.sc.egov.usda.gov/RollupViewer.aspx?hid=17061 . As District Conservationists you should be well versed in the contents of this GM chapter.

Questions:

1. What safety training does your state conduct – how often?

2. Do you feel that your employees are adequately trained in safe procedures?

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

NRCS has an entire General Manual Chapter on personal safety at GM 360.420.U at http://policy.nrcs.usda.gov/viewerFS.aspx?id=453 that you should be familiar with. This is the introduction:

Part 420 - Safety and Health Management Program

Subpart U - Personal Safety/Sexual Assault

420.240 General

a. This subpart establishes the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Personal Safety/Sexual Assault (PSSA) policy whereby NRCS employees are given uniform, systematic information and training. This part deals with the assault of an NRCS employee by a nongovernment person (civilian).

b. Regional conservationist (RAC) and State Conservationists (STC) should appoint appropriate personnel to implement the Personal Safety/Sexual Assault training.

c. This directive establishes the requirements for the development and implementation of the NRCS Personal Safety/Sexual Assault program.

The Office of Personnel Management has many excellent resources, including one entitled Dealing with Workplace Violence which can be found at: http://apps.opm.gov/publications/pages/details.cfm?Title=Dealing%20with%20Workplace%20Violence%20-%20A%20Guide%20for%20Agency%20Planners. USDA has a website at http://www.usda.gov/da/workviolence.htm that contains several helpful items. Other government-issued publications are available to help you draft your own policy; check websites of agencies such as Federal Protective Service, Department of Labor and the U.S. Marshals Service which has one on the Vulnerability Assessment of Federal Facilities. A helpful guide for employees as citizens is A Citizen Guide to Disaster Preparedness which is available from the GSA publications distribution center in Pueblo, Colorado.

Follow up questions:

1. Does your state have a handbook on workplace violence or personal safety? If you are not aware of such a handbook, contact your State Administrative Officer to inquire about how your state handles work place violence incidents.

2. What training is provided to employees and supervisors on preventing or handling personal safety issues related to harassment, abuse, etc.? If no training has been provided in the last three years, what training would you recommend that your state organize and conduct?

Employee Counseling Services Program (ECSP)

GM 360.420.160

The Federal Employee Substance Abuse Education and Treatment Act of 1986, Public Law 99-570; Federal Employees' Health and Counseling Programs, 5 CFR 792; The Drug-Free Federal Workplace, Executive Order 12564; and Employee Counseling Service Program (ECSP), Departmental Regulation 4430-1 require that ECSP be made available to all Department of Agriculture employees.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is required, under these authorities, to review existing programs and is authorized and encouraged to establish an employee assistance program to deal constructively with the safety and health of the employee in relation to his or her work. FPM 792, Federal Employees Health and Counseling Programs, should be consulted for guidance and further instruction.

NRCS employees who have problems affecting performance and productivity (i.e. alcoholism, alcohol abuse, drug dependency, drug abuse and emotional-behavioral problems as illnesses or health problems) will receive the same careful consideration and respect as other NRCS employees who have any other illness and through the Employee Counseling Services Program (ECSP) will be provided assistance in overcoming these problems. Therefore, when an NRCS employee's work performance, attendance, conduct or reliability is impaired because of alcohol,

drugs, or emotional-behavioral problems, appropriate action must be taken under provisions of the SCS-ECSP.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLANS - CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS PLANS

In accordance with General Manual **Part 403 - Homeland Security/Crisis Responsibilities** (currently under revision) NRCS offices are directed to create and maintain both Emergency Response Plans (ERP) that detail what employees should do in local emergency situations such as fires, floods, threats, etc., and Continuity of Operations Plans (COOP) that specify chains of commands, designated areas of responsibility, alternative work locations, etc. in the event of a disaster or widespread emergency such as a pandemic outbreak, hostile attack, etc.

1. Does your State Office have an Emergency Response Plan and a Continuity of Operations Plan? Where will state office operations be relocated in the event of a disaster that impacts the State Office?

2. Does your local office have an Emergency Response Plan? What involvement did the local Food and Agriculture Council (FAC) have in creating the plans?

3. Do you conduct periodic drills or hold briefing sessions with employees in the building?

ADVERSE WEATHER CONDITIONS

From GM 360.415.2:

Office closure decisions will be administered by joint decision of the local FAC. Office closure decisions at other offices will be made by the heads of the office. Where more than one office-type is located in the same area, the heads of the office will make a joint decision. Office closures for the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area will be administered in accordance with the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM's) direction.

1. What guidelines does your office follow for releasing employees in case of severe weather or other dangerous conditions?

2. Was this policy developed locally or at the state level? Do you feel it should have been developed at a level other than what it was?

3. How are employees advised of the policy on weather-related dismissals, how frequently?

Summary: you should now have an awareness of many aspects related to safety of our employees and equipment, reporting incidents, illnesses, and even fatalities and have learned where to go for information regarding workplace violence. You have an awareness of NRCS requirements for Emergency Preparedness and Continuity of Operation Plans in the event of a natural or man-made disaster.