

Benefits Bulletin

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To: All USGS Employees

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Subject: Time to Review Your Benefits and Health Care Reform FEHB information

It's that time of year...time to review your Earnings and Leave Statement...time to remind you of your benefits resources. It is also tax-time and you may wonder about your responsibilities for reporting health care coverage.

Earnings and Leave Statement

Each employee is responsible for verification of pay, deductions, and leave. Federal Employees Health Benefits Open Season changes were effective January 8, 2017. Other Open Season changes such as Federal Employee Dental & Vision and Flexible Spending Accounts were effective January 1, 2017. Both of these dates are in Pay Period 3 and will be reflected on your [Earnings and Leave Statement](#) for pay date January 31. Review your statement to make sure the correct deductions have been taken and report any issues immediately. Include in your review:

- Health benefit code & deductions
- Dental enrollment (if elected under Benefeds)
- Vision enrollment (if elected under Benefeds)
- Flexible Spending account (FSA) enrollment
- CFC deduction(s)
- Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) contributions (elections made in prior years continue automatically)
- TSP Catch-up contributions (age 50 or older) requires an affirmative election each year

Have you found your W-2?

Your 2016 W-2 form is available in [Employee Express](#).

Health Care Reform – Individual Responsibility

As you complete your 2016 taxes, you'll want to review the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) [Health Care Coverage Forms for Federal Employees FastFacts](#).

The [1095-C](#) is now available in [Employee Express](#). Your health care provider will mail you the [1095-B form](#) which will list your dependents. You must retain these documents with your tax documents.

Are your tax withholdings correct?

You may be interested in the [Federal and State tax formulas](#). Keep in mind that the following deductions are withheld on a pre-tax basis (unless you've waived the option): health, dental, and vision benefits, and FSA. Traditional TSP contributions are tax deferred.

Wondering where to find a pay period calendar?

[Pay schedule calendars](#) through 2025 are available.

Things to know

The 2017 GS Pay Tables are available [here](#). Locality pay does count toward Basic pay whereas COLA (for those in Alaska, Hawaii, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands) does not. Life insurance, retirement benefits, and government contributions are based on Basic pay.

Benefits Deductions based on a percentage of Basic Pay include:

- FERS (this is the Basic Benefit portion)
- CSRS
- TSP (if you elected a percentage)
- Life Insurance – Basic and Option B
- OASDI (aka Social Security)
- Medicare
- Federal Taxes

Benefit Deductions based on a fixed cost include:

- Health benefits
- Life Insurance – Option A & C
- TSP-if elected a specific dollar amount
- TSP Catch-up
- TSP Loans
- Dental and/or Vision
- Long Term Care
- Flexible Spending Accounts

How can I change my take home pay now?

You may change your Federal Tax withholdings and TSP contributions at any time throughout the year. These changes may be made in [Employee Express](#).

You will find an [IRS withholding calculator](#) to help you determine whether you need to adjust your withholdings to avoid having too much or too little Federal income tax withheld from your pay.

You may reduce your life insurance at any time by completing [SF 2817](#). This change cannot be made in Employee Express. Keep in mind you need to have it for five years immediately prior to any type of retirement to continue the

benefit into retirement. Please send the completed SF 2817 to Sadie Bello at sbello@usgs.gov if you are reducing your life insurance coverage.

How can I reduce my taxable income now?

You may be able to reduce your taxable income by contributing more to your TSP account.

Thrift Savings Plan

You may start, stop, or make changes to your [Thrift Savings Plan](#) any time of the year. Employees who are either in the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) or the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) can contribute up to **\$18,000** per year. This does not include the matching contributions that FERS employees are entitled to receive. TSP has a [calculator](#) to estimate what your net pay check would be if you change your TSP contributions.

Employees who turn 50 before December 31, 2017 may put an additional \$6,000 into TSP via Catch-Up Contributions, which means you may put a total of \$24,000 into your TSP account. TSP changes are made through [Employee Express](#). Changes will be effective the beginning of the next pay period after it is processed.

Allocation into five different funds can be made anytime on the [TSP](#) website. The [Lifecycle \(L\) funds](#) are an additional investment option. The L funds provide you with a way to diversify your account among the [G, F, C, S, and I Funds](#), using professionally determined investment mixes that are tailored to the date you think you will need the money in TSP. TSP has [videos](#) to learn more about the different funds, the cost of taking a loan, Roth accounts, contribution allocations, interfund transfers, and much more.

Retirement Savings Contribution Credit

Have you looked to see if you are eligible for a [Retirement Savings Contribution Credit](#)? The amount of credit is dependent on your adjusted gross income reported on your Form 1040 or 1040A. This could be a reason to contribute more to TSP to reduce your adjusted gross income.

[myRA](#) – Retirement Savings Plan (especially for those not eligible for the Thrift Savings Plan)

The [myRA](#) is a [Roth IRA](#) that invests in a new U. S. Treasury retirement savings bond, which will not lose money. myRA costs nothing to open, has no fees, and doesn't require a minimum amount of savings. It is designed for people without access to employer-sponsored retirement savings such as TSP or the FERS retirement system. You can contribute up to \$5,500 per year (up to \$6,500 if you are 50 or older). The interest rate is the same as the TSP G Fund. When your account reaches \$15,000, you must then transfer the balance to a Roth IRA at a financial institution, where you can continue investing. It [cannot be rolled over](#) to a TSP account.

There are several ways to participate including setting up a discretionary allotment in Employee Express or directing all or part of your federal tax refund. Visit [myRA](#) to learn more.

Employees covered by the FERS and CSRS retirement systems can also contribute to myRA. FERS employees will likely first want to contribute at least 5% to TSP to take advantage of the matching contributions.

The [Retirement Savings Contribution Credit](#) may also apply if you have an myRA. The amount of credit is dependent on your adjusted gross income reported on your Form 1040 or 1040A.

Federal Employees Benefits Statement

Your [Federal Benefit Employee Statement](#) is an informative tool for your personal financial planning. The statement is updated bi-weekly. It is available through [Employee Express](#) after you log in.

Life Insurance

Turning 45, 50, 55, 60, 65, 70, 75 this year? It may be time to review your coverage if you are participating in the Federal Employees Group Life Insurance (FEGLI) program. The Basic Life insurance rate is constant (15 cents per \$1000 of coverage.) However, the [optional rates](#) increase every five years. You will find the coverage you elected on your [Notification of Personnel Action \(SF 50\)](#) in block #27 or in Section D of your [Federal Employees Benefits Statement](#). You can use the [calculator](#) to calculate the value and cost of your life insurance.

If you decide you want to drop some of your coverage, you will need to complete the [Life Insurance Election form](#). Please send the completed SF 2817 to Sadie Bello on the Benefits Team at sbello@usgs.gov.

It is possible to increase your coverage within 60 days of a qualifying life event (marriage, divorce, the death of your spouse, or the birth or adoption of a child) or you can have a physical exam.

Designation of Beneficiaries

You may want to review information about [Designation of Beneficiaries](#) for retirement, Federal Employees Group Life Insurance, unpaid compensation (monies the Survey owes you,) and TSP.

Retirement (FERS an CSRS)

Information regarding [CSRS \(including CSRS Offset\) and FERS retirement plans and retirement planning](#) is available on the Benefits Website.

FERS Employees: Sick leave now counts toward your retirement annuity computation!

Flexible Spending Accounts

The Flexible Spending Account allows health care and limited expense health care FSAs to rollover \$500 if you enroll for the following year. Be sure to [check this out](#).

Employee Assistance Program

[EAP Consultants, Inc.](#) is our provider for assistance or information on emotional issues, work problems, substance abuse, stress, marital/family concerns, financial matters, legal issues, eldercare resources, etc.

Long Term Care

You can apply at any time. The [Long Term Care](#) Partners make the determination for enrollment eligibility.

Turning age 65 soon?

You may want to apply for Medicare. [Benefits Bulletin 13-2](#) provided additional resources when considering Medicare. You may be eligible to receive a [Social Security](#) benefit and still continue to work.

Questions

The [USGS website on Pay and Benefits](#) provides multiples links and resources to all benefits, including all prior Benefits Bulletins. This information is available on the internet so you may share with your family or view from home with ease: <http://www.usgs.gov/humancapital/pb/paybenefitslinks.html>. Contact your [Benefits Specialist](#) if you have any questions. If you are unsure of whom your benefits specialist is you may send an e-mail to benefits@usgs.gov.