

BENEFITS BULLETIN

January 26, 2011

BULLETIN NO: 11-01

SUBJECT: Time to Review Your Benefits

TO: All USGS Employees

It's that time of year....time to review your Earnings and Leave Statement....time to remind you of your benefits resources....

Earnings and Leave Statement

Each employee is responsible for verification of pay, deductions, and leave. Any Open Season or other changes you may have made that were effective January 2, 2011 (Pay Period 2) will be reflected on your Statement for pay date January 25. Review your statement to make sure the correct deductions have been taken by reviewing your Statement and report any issues immediately. Include in your review:

- Health benefit code & deduction
- 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 contribution (for those age 50 or older) (requires an affirmative election each year)

Have you found your W-2?

Your 2010 W-2 form is available in Employee Express at <https://www.employeeexpress.gov>.

Wondering where to find a pay period calendar?

Pay schedule calendars for 2011 through 2025 are available on the NBC Payroll website at <http://www3.nbc.gov/customer/PersonnelPay/Payroll/payrolltopics/payrollschedules.html>.

Are your tax withholdings correct?

Please consult this site for Federal and State tax formulas:

<http://www3.nbc.gov/customer/personnelpay/Payroll/payrolltopics/taxFormulas.html>. Keep in mind that the following deductions are pre-tax (unless you've waived the option): health, dental and vision benefits, and FSA. TSP contributions are tax deferred.

Things to know:

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 and retirement benefits are based on basic pay.

Benefit Deductions based on a percentage of Basic Pay include:

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

Benefit Deductions based on a fixed cost include:

- Health Benefits
- Life Insurance - options
- TSP (if you elected a specific dollar amount)
- TSP Catch-up
- TSP loans
- Dental
- 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 at <https://www.employeeexpress.gov>.

You will find an IRS withholding calculator to help you determine whether you need to give your employer a new Form W-4, Employee's Withholding Allowance Certificate, to avoid having too much or too little Federal income tax withheld from your pay at: <http://www.irs.gov/individuals/article/0,,id=96196,00.html?portlet=4>

You may reduce your life insurance at any time by completing Standard Form 2817 online at http://www.opm.gov/forms/pdf_fill/sf2817.pdf. 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.

How can I reduce my taxable income now?

You may be able to reduce your taxable income by contributing more to your Thrift Savings Plan account. You may contribute a total of \$16,500 per year. If you are 50 or over you may contribute an additional \$5,500.

Benefits Website

The USGS benefits internal website at <http://internal.usgs.gov/ops/hro/benefits/> includes a wide variety of information on your benefits. The "Insurance" and "TSP" pages have recently been redesigned. All Benefits Bulletins are archived on this page. There are also Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) based on life events such as getting married, having a baby, changing work schedules, resigning, and retiring listed under "What do you want to know?"

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: <https://www.employeeexpress.gov> after you log in. Click on the link in "Related Sites."

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 **\$16,500** per year. This does not include the matching contributions that FERS employees are entitled to receive.

Employees who turn 50 before December 31, 2011 may put an additional \$5,500 into their TSP account via Catch-Up Contributions, which means that in 2011 you may put a total of \$22,000 into your TSP account.

TSP changes are made through Employee Express at: <https://www.employeeexpress.gov>. 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 at: <http://www.tsp.gov/>. The Lifecycle (L) funds (https://www.tsp.gov/investmentfunds/lfundsheets/fundPerformance_L.shtml) 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.

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 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 at: <http://www.opm.gov/calculator/worksheet.asp> 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, SF 2817, found at: http://www.opm.gov/forms/pdf_fill/sf2817.pdf.

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.

Retirement (CSRS and FERS)

You will find general information regarding CSRS (including CSRS Offset) and FERS retirement plans at: <http://www.opm.gov/retire/index.aspx>.

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

Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

There are EAP Providers for different geographic locations as listed on the website at: <http://internal.usgs.gov/ops/hro/benefits/eap/index.html>.

Designation of Beneficiaries

General information about Designation of Beneficiaries for retirement, Federal Employees Group Life insurance, unpaid compensation (monies the Survey owes you), and TSP can be found at: <http://www.opm.gov/insure/life/beneficiary/designate.asp>

Long Term Care

You can apply at anytime. The Long Term Care Partners make the determination for enrollment eligibility. Information can be found at: <http://www.ltcfeds.com/index.html>

Turning age 65 soon?

You may want to apply for Medicare. Also, you may be eligible to receive a Social Security benefit and still continue to work. Check out the following sites for more information: <http://www.opm.gov/insure/health/medicare/index.asp> and <http://www.ssa.gov/>

Questions?

Contact your Human Resources Benefits Specialist if you have any questions regarding the information in this Bulletin. All Benefits Bulletins are posted on the USGS Employee Benefits Intranet webpage at <http://internal.usgs.gov/ops/hro/benefits>.

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