

USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Report

Global Agricultural Information Network

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POLICY

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Administrative

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Report Highlights:

U.S. Embassy Mexico City held an interagency managerial issues meeting on Wednesday, January 29, 2014, to discuss wide-ranging issues like: new security training requirements for visitors to Mission Mexico, local situational telework policy, and the request for agencies to offer more eligible family member (EFM) positions. Post would like to draw FAS/Washington staff attention to issues highlighted in yellow to gauge whether further discussion is needed or if action can be taken.

General Information:

The U.S. Embassy in Mexico City established a Quarterly Inter-Agency Management Meeting (QIAMM) in December 2012 to discuss management issues affecting all sections of the Country Team. The fifth QIAMM meeting was held on Wednesday, January 29, 2013, and was chaired by State/Embassy Mexico City Minister Counselor for Management Affairs Sandy Robinson. USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) was represented by Peter Olson and Adam Branson while USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) was represented by Jeromy McKim.

The agenda consisted of the issues, below. A brief summary of main points is provided for reference and clarification, as well. Many points are part of an ongoing dialogue and were cited in previous QIAMM reports. USDA agencies can add or request items be put on the agenda for discussion.

1. Welcome (Sandy Robinson, Management Counselor)
2. HTSOS/FACT Training for Non-State TDYers (MGMT)
3. Shelter-In-Place Request Process (MGMT)
4. FY2014 ICASS Customer Satisfaction Survey (MGMT)
5. Flu Vaccine (HU)
6. Telework Policy (HR)
7. EFM Employment
8. T&A for LE v. USDH Staff (FMC)
9. Other Issues

2. HTSOS/FACT (Security) Training

- Please review the policy that was circulated Mission-wide on 28-Jan-2014 (Attached to this report)
- Full implementation of the policy for TDY personnel will begin on 10-Feb-2014.
- HTSOS is an online course that requires access to OpenNet to complete.
- Non-State personnel must complete an [SF-182](#), including training POC and fiscal data and submit the form to the Foreign Service Institute's Registrar's Office to enroll.
- FACT is a five-day course taught in West Virginia.
- The training requirement does not/not apply to third party contractors.
- The requirement is – at this point – for the entire consular district, not just for the post in question.

This new policy will mean that all USDA official travelers to a Mission Mexico danger pay post (including EFMs) will need to take either HTSOS (online FSI course) or FACT (West Virginia) training. FACT training is required if traveler will be in a danger pay post for 45 days or more in a calendar year. Neither training is required if traveler has taken FACT training within the last five years. Agencies and their headquarters are encouraged to consider how this requirement will impact their activities in Mexico and consider reaching out to STATE HQ to voice any concerns. Given the very high numbers of non-FAS USDA visitors (FS, ARS, AMS, APHIS, NRCS) to Mexico, FAS HQ needs to consider how to relay the message to the rest of the department. MC Berman has directly flagged this issue for a few people in Washington including OFSO DA and AD Anderson.

3. Shelter in Place

- o Personnel traveling to danger posts or unaccompanied posts sometimes have the option of requesting that their families shelter in place in Mexico while they complete that assignment.
- o We can support those requests in most cases, but we need timely (early) notification to ensure that we have enough residences in the housing pool.
- o HR handles the paperwork, which includes GSO and Management clearance before it goes to the Front Office for approval

4. ICASS Customer Satisfaction Survey

- o The global survey begins in January; more information will be coming soon. Please encourage your personnel and 16 years old and over Eligible Family Members (EFMs) to complete the survey.

5. Flu Vaccine

- o Please encourage all personnel (USDH, LE) and USDH/EFMs to get the vaccination.
- o This year's flu includes a strain of H1/N1 and at least 135 people (OpenNet only) have died from the flu in Mexico.
- o This year's vaccine includes protection against H1/N1.
- o There is no charge for a flu shot for any USDH, LE staffer or EFM.
- o The vaccination does not/not give you the flu.

6. Situational Telework

- o Each agency must confirm that their employees can participate in the telework program. Please review the policy (attached to this report) and report your decision to Post.
- o The Chief of Mission has approved a telework policy for Mission Mexico.
- o "Situational" means for a short, defined period; there must be limits to comply with Mexican labor law.
- o You cannot use telework to enable you to care for children or other relatives.
- o You cannot use telework when you are taking sick or annual leave.
- o HR, the supervisor and the employee must all sign off on the telework agreement before it is approved by the Minister Counselor for Consular Affairs (for Consular) or the Minister Counselor for Management Affairs (all others).
- o This does apply to LE staff.

7. EFM Employment

- o Because the Embassy is so large, there is a misperception that lots of EFM jobs are available. In fact, only 65 EFM positions exist. Of the 65 positions, 56 are with the Department of State.
- o Please consider creating EFM positions within your agency presence here.
 - It may often be cheaper than creating USDH positions.
- o Also consider opening LES positions to EFMs and looking at EFMs for PSA or contract work.

Post is reviewing our current staff vacancies and will notify Embassy HR if any of them are PSA track or otherwise open to EFMs. If so, Post will work with HR to ensure vacancies are advertised to the EFM community. Post does not expect to prioritize EFM candidates over similarly qualified candidates.

8. T&A Changes

- The Global Financial Service Center has changed the reporting deadlines for LE and USDH T&A. As a result, Mexico's Financial Management Center (FMC) is now submitting LE and USDH T&A at different times.
- We will not be changing the Mission Mexico due dates for T&A.

It had been hoped that the current LES T&A deadline could be pushed back (currently due 1.5 weeks early) so that less adjustments and modifications would need to be submitted. However, this will not be happening.

9. Other Issues

- State Department Danger Pay location designation is based on location of the post, regardless of consular district coverage. This means, for example, that danger pay is paid in Tijuana (an area with relatively lax travel restrictions and guidance according to Post Travel Policy) but not in places like Sinaloa or Michoacan (areas with extremely onerous travel restrictions). Agencies are also allowed to set their own danger pay zones if they see fit.
- What about furniture for the Furniture and Appliance Pool (FAP)?
 - Furniture is beginning to come in already.
 - We have placed a VERY large order with the vendor to furnish residences beginning March 1, 2014 for those agencies who have signed up and paid for those positions.
 - We have requested 12 months' notice of new arrivals to ensure that we can furnish their residences. NOTE: FAS Mexico provided notification to FMC, Housing, and others on the planned Mexico City and Monterrey needs in September 2013.
 - We can work with you to handle emergency cases, but we don't have furniture here in storage; we have to order from the vendor, which requires at least four months of lead time.
 - What about personnel going to consulates? –Please contact the consulate GSO to confirm that furniture is en route.
- The Embassy will begin a departing post series in March 2014 designed to educate exiting officers of their responsibilities and requirements when they leave Mission Mexico.