



REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
PACIFIC OCEAN DIVISION, CORPS OF ENGINEERS
FORT SHAFTER, HAWAII 96858-5440

CEPOD-CS/IM (25-1)

19 October 2001

COMMANDER'S POLICY MEMORANDUM #7

SUBJECT: Standing Operating Procedures (SOP) for Electronic Mail in Staff Actions

1. The use of electronic mail is now integral with daily operations of the Division. To ensure the productive and effective use of this automated tool as an official medium for transmitting staff actions, policy guidance has been consolidated into the enclosed Standing Operating Procedures (SOP) document.
2. The SOP shall be reviewed annually and re-issued as needed. This policy shall remain in effect, at the discretion of the Commander, until revised, withdrawn or cancelled in writing.

Encl

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DISTRIBUTION (POD List 01-1):
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Standing Operating Procedures (SOP) of Electronic Mail for Staff Actions

1. Purpose. This SOP establishes policy, guidelines, and standards regarding the use of electronic mail for POD staff actions and as an official medium for transmitting information.

2. Background. Electronic mail is now integral with the daily operations of the Division. As with any other automated tool, if electronic mail is poorly used or implemented, its impacts on productivity and staff effectiveness can be profound. Electronic mail procedures should be disciplined to better complement Division staff operations, but not to the extent that procedures suffocate creativity, information flow, and decision-making. Electronic mail procedures should reflect common sense and good management practices.

3. Individual and Staff Responsibilities.

a. The Division staff needs to understand the fundamentals of the Army's staff organization and operations; how to prepare and manage Army correspondence; and the extent of their specified and implied authority.

b. At a minimum, all staff and action officers should be familiar with the following references:

1) FM 101-5, Staff Organization and Operations, 31 May 97
(<http://www.adtdl.army.mil/egi-bin/atdl/fm101-5/default.htm>).

2) AR25-50, Preparing and Managing Correspondence, 5 Mar 01
(http://www.usapa.army.mil/pdf/files/r25_50.pdf).

3) PODR 1-1-3, Delegations of Authority, 3 Oct 97
(<http://www.pod.usace.army.mil/info/pod/regs/podr1-1-3.pdf>).

4) Commander's Policy Memo #3, Delegation of Signature Authority/Authority Line, 19 Oct 01

5) ER 25-1-74, Information Management- Electronic Mail, 21 Mar 94
(<http://www.usace.army.mil/inet/usace-docs/eng-regs/er25-1-74/toc.htm>).

6) ST7000, Action Officer Development Course, US Army Training and Doctrine Command, Army Correspondence Course Program, The Army Institute for Professional Development.

4. Electronic Mail for Staff Operations. Staffing actions via electronic mail is an excellent way to quickly and economically extract and pass information. However, staffing actions via electronic mail can also circumvent command chains; lines of authorities; and outpace the command and decision-making sequences of the organization— thus creating confusion and inefficiencies. The “liberal” use of distributions lists and “cc” functionality create a “free for all” environment in unsolicited replies, personal (not official) opinions, and forwarded mail to unintended or unknown recipients. This “free for all” environment is excellent for brain storming but often not for staff operations within a hierarchical organization. Some sense of discipline is required to ensure efficiency and accountability.

a. Principal Staff Officer.

1) A principal staff officer acts directly for and at the direction of the Commander. The principal staff officer’s actions are usually formal in nature, requiring specifically authorized signature authority (i.e., “FOR THE COMMANDER”) and must be within the principal staff member’s responsibilities. Staffing actions can require prior coordination with staff peers or counterparts and may be accomplished through informal communications. Staff actions may also require routine dissemination of official policies, information or guidance and may also be informally accomplished.

2) Staff Actions involving taskings to subordinate commands may be required. Taskings to subordinate commands must be through formal correspondence. Staff members may issue taskings under the heading of “FOR THE COMMANDER” within the scope of their authority subject to the constraints in PODR 1-1-3 (e.g., adverse personnel actions, Command Inspection feedback, controversial and high visibility issues, correspondence to Members of Congress, other General or Flag Officers, etc.). Electronic mail should complement proper staffing procedures conducted through formal correspondence-- not circumvent or confuse such procedures.

b. Action officers.

1) Individuals who are not principal staff officers may be assigned a specific staff action for various reasons, including their subject matter expertise concerning the action. Such staff actions may range from simple quick coordination or extensive correspondence, study, and recommendations. Taskings to subordinate commands or coordination with higher headquarters may be required as a part of such staff actions. Use formal correspondence if formal coordination or tasking through the Command chain is necessary to complete the action. Action officers are not automatically authorized to sign for the Commander or principal staff officers. This authority must be formally assigned IAW AR 25-50. Unless specifically authorized to sign for the Commander or principal staff officer, action officers must task through their command channels.

2) Background coordination should generally be made if possible, by informal methods through staff peers or counterparts and may be done using informal communications.

c. Electronic mail messaging.

1) Use the “To” feature of electronic mail messaging to seek a response on an action on the part of the addressee(s). It may be more appropriate to provide a single consolidated-staffed suspense than multiple individual replies to an electronic mail message that is sent “To” multiple recipients.

2) Use the “Copy Furnished” feature of electronic mail messaging to provide a copy of an electronic mail message that may be of some interest or useful information to the staff member who receives the copy. Provide “Copy Furnished” copies of electronic mail messages to supervisors as appropriate to maintain proper and essential information flow within the chain of command or a staff element (“stovepipe”).

3) You should not use the “Copy Furnished” feature of electronic mail messaging to seek a response from the staff member(s) to which the copy of an electronic mail message is sent.

4) There is no obligation for a staff member to reply to a “Copy Furnished” version of an electronic mail message. If the staff member receives a “Copy Furnished” version of an electronic mail message and wishes to respond to it, the staff member should check to see if it is appropriate to directly respond to the sender or would be more appropriate to respond through the staff member’s command chain. In responding to any electronic mail message, staff members should clearly differentiate between personal opinions, beliefs, and those of official views and guidance.

5) Limit the number of addressees for any electronic mail message. Automatically sending electronic mail messages via a “shotgun” approach does not always assure best information dissemination. “Shotgunning” electronic mail messages can create confusion and multiple, unsolicited responses from staff members who have no business being involved in a particular matter. If the addressee of an electronic mail message feels that other staff members within that addressee’s stovepipe should see the message, let that stovepipe disseminate the electronic mail message. Appropriate exceptions may be time sensitive critical notices such as safety messages or security advisories where the most expedient distribution may be “shotgunning” through multiple distribution lists.

6) Do not automatically reply to all addressees of an electronic mail message. Limit responses to those who have a real need for responsive comments.

7) Do not use the electronic mail system as a forum for public debate or discussion of general or specific topics. Use personal meetings, phone calls, or televideo conferences to conduct debate or discussion of specific topics.

8) Do not use the electronic mail system for discussion of unofficial topics, unless authorized by appropriate authority. Examples of unofficial topics that will generally not be authorized for discussion include political or religious opinions, comments about current events, jokes, entertainment items, or aspects of a person's personal life. Do not disseminate "Chain Messages" (messages calling for multiple responses by an ever-widening pool of participants), or unofficial, downloaded items from the Internet (as also these items often carry computer viruses). Examples of unofficial topics that may be authorized by appropriate authority include news about present or former Corps employees (e.g., promotions, illness, deaths, etc.). An electronic bulletin board has been set up for unofficial and personal (non-commercial) transactions but only to the extent and manner allowed by published guidance.

9) Do not use the electronic mail system for dissemination of employee union information or discussion of union matters of any kind. The employee union(s) representing Division employees currently use (by agreement) other forms of dissemination of information.

5. Preparing Correspondence. All staff members must be familiar with, and apply, the basic requirements of AR25-50. Army standards must be used when preparing official correspondence. Use of electronic mail caused many staff members to deviate from official procedures and form in preparing official correspondence.

a. There are generally two types of correspondence recognized under Government and Army law and regulations—formal (or official) correspondences and informal (or personal). Both types of correspondence when transmitted through electronic mail are considered official records and are potentially subject to release to persons outside the Government under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and subject to civil discovery during litigation.

b. Formal or official correspondences are prepared in memorandum or message format IAW AR 25-50 and POD Supplement 1 to AR 25-50. Informal or personal messages may be in any format but should adhere, as much as possible, to the above-stated references.

1) Only individuals having signature authority may sign formal or official correspondence. When disseminating via electronic mail unsigned copies of signed-official correspondence, insert an "/s/" above the signature block to document that a signed copy is on file. The originating office shall retain a signed copy of the electronically transmitted correspondence for future reference or audit. The record copy of the correspondence shall include the MARKS number and, if applicable, all other appropriate backup documents.

2) Electronic mail dispatched to activities outside the Corps is restricted to informal communications or advance copies of formal or official correspondence being sent through the mail. Electronic mail as an official means of correspondence with an outside activity is not authorized unless an authorizing agreement exists between the Corps and the activity.

c. Personal information (i.e., social security number, date of birth, home phone number, or any other personal identifier) needs to be protected IAW the Privacy Act. Do not transmit personal information via unsecured electronic mail systems unless unauthorized release is protected by approved encryption or authorized by the individual.

d. Classified information **shall NOT be transmitted on any electronic mail system** unless the electronic mail system has been specifically approved for classified information. Mail containing information defined as Unclassified Sensitive Two (US2) is the highest level of sensitivity allowed over the POD electronic mail system. Classified electronic mail may be sent over SIPRNET communication links. Appropriate markings such as FOUO, CONFIDENTIAL, or SECRET etc should be included on all electronic messages as required.

e. EEO Matters. In order to assure the greatest confidentiality, communications with and about aggrieved individuals (pre-complaint and formal complaint stages) will continue to be handled with personal telephone calls or written correspondence even though the aggrieved prefers to use electronic mail. This is IAW CEEEO Memorandum, subject: Use of Electronic Mail- EEO Complaints Processing, #96-3 dated 13 May 1996.

f. Legal privilege notation on correspondence and other documents. Any electronic mail message, or attached correspondence, bearing the following (or similar) restrictive headings:

*“Attorney –Client Privileged Communications
Do NOT Release Under FOIA
Do NOT Copy
Do NOT Forward”*

Or

*“Attorney Work Product
Do NOT Release Under FOIA
Do NOT Copy
Do NOT Forward”*

SHALL NOT be further disseminated via electronic mail or other means without prior coordination with and concurrence by the Office of Counsel. Unauthorized and/or uncontrolled dissemination of such correspondence may void the legal privilege that originally attached to the correspondence.

g. Additional aspects of preparing electronic mail messages. Below are some additional common guidance and hints that may be helpful in your daily preparation of documents:

1) Do's:

- Remember there should be **No** expectation of privacy.
- Put a subject on all messages; the electronic mail subject should match the organizational correspondence subject.
- Put the correspondence in the message body (not as an attachment), if at all possible.
- Identify attachments if included, in the body of the electronic message, e.g., "Attachment 1 is in MS Word 6.0 for Windows." To eliminate incompatibility issues, USACE and POD have standardized attachment formats, including versions.
- Send only one copy (no follow-up by US Mail or FAX). Multiple copies arriving through different carriers and at different times are confusing. Identify advance copies or drafts prominently at the top of the correspondence.
- Do use "please" and "thank you"

2) Don'ts:

- Don't use ALL capital (upper case) lettering in messages. Upper case lettering is equivalent to shouting and often difficult to read.
- Don't share passwords to ensure your electronic mail remains secured.
- Don't unnecessarily ask for return receipts. Return receipts cause extra overload on the electronic mail system.
- Don't do a "Reply All" to a #DISTA distribution unless absolutely necessary.

6. Managing records stored on electronic media.

a. The timely and accurate retrieval of electronically created and stored correspondence relies heavily upon proper labeling and indexing. Archive or store electronic mail IAW Army record keeping procedures.

b. The originating office shall retain the signed paper copy of the electronically transmitted correspondence as the official record copy. If requesting a receipt, include a copy of the receipt in the official file, to show the date and time the addressee(s) "read" the electronic mail document.

c. The retention standards and the disposition schedule for electronic records will be the same as those for other types of records found in AR 25-400-2, Appendix B.

d. Those who perform duties for more than one organization will identify and store messages created in each capacity and maintain them separately.

7. Electronic Bulletin Board.

a. Proper use of electronic bulletin boards allows wide access, eliminates numerous copies of the same message thereby eliminating unnecessary high volume network traffic, and reduces the need for computer storage space.

b. Users may put official and unofficial messages concerning morale, health and welfare or classified advertisements, on the bulletin board. Users must exercise proper judgment when placing items on the bulletin board, including location of the item, wording of the notice, appropriateness of information, and its ultimate removal.