



U.S. Railroad Retirement Board Plain Writing Act of 2010 Annual Compliance Report May 2016

Background

President Obama signed the Plain Writing Act of 2010 into law on October 13, 2010. This law requires agencies to communicate in a manner “that the public can understand and use,” and applies to any application, form, informational material, letter or notice. It also defines plain writing as “clear, concise, well-organized, and follows other best practices appropriate to the subject or field or intended audience.”

The U.S. Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) has always tried to communicate with its customers and stakeholders in a clear, understandable manner. We have continued this effort with renewed emphasis in the context of the intent and requirements of the Plain Writing Act, with the goal of improving our ability to clearly communicate information about our benefits and services, and how to access them.

Initial Implementation

The RRB created a page on its website dedicated to plain language, as required by the law, in July 2011. The page includes information on guidelines and best practices in this area, as well as a link to an e-mail address should a visitor to the web page have any questions, concerns or complaints about agency documents. The agency has posted its implementation plan and subsequent compliance reports on this page, with the RRB’s Public Affairs unit charged with overseeing these activities.

Current Activities

In recent years, the RRB has used a training vendor affiliated with the Chicago Federal Executive Board, SkillPath Training. This company offers several different courses on various forms of written communication, and we have had employees with responsibilities that involve written communication periodically attend these courses. In fiscal year 2015, we had 56 employees participate in training on effective business writing.

The agency also implemented a Learning Management System (LMS), which is part of an online training platform known as *RRB University*. The LMS helps the RRB manage and plan training activities. And through many online courses available through *RRB University*, the agency hopes to expand use of plain writing in fiscal year 2016 and beyond. This includes an online course specifically covering the Plain Writing Act requirements and principles of plain writing, which will be mandatory for all employees. In addition, select RRB employees have tested other online courses on business writing and grammar, with in-house marketing planned to encourage greater participation in these courses.

In the past year, we have continued to review internal and external documents and online material to make them clearer, following guidelines and best practices related to plain language and writing. The agency is also in the process of implementing a system that will automate and coordinate the internal review process for a wide variety of agency documents and publications. This will be especially useful in terms of expanding the number of employees able to efficiently collaborate on a particular document, and the resulting scope of review, which will undoubtedly help improve the clarity and comprehensibility of the RRB's information.

Questions or requests for additional information can be directed to Director of Public Affairs Michael P. Freeman as follows.

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