



The Austin Financial Center  
(AFC)  
*FISCAL DIGEST*

**An AFC Bi-Annual Newsletter for  
Agencies**

**October 2008**

## Message from the Regional Director

*This has been a busy year for the AFC. We, along with others in Financial Management Service (FMS), have been dedicated to the President's Economic Stimulus Payment initiative that followed on the heels of our regular busy tax season. The outstanding ability of our employees to meet the challenge to flawlessly process an additional 116,232,521 in economic relief payments (as of September 29th) in addition to the scheduled support to your agencies has been phenomenal. In conjunction, FMS and AFC have successfully moved forward on many technological improvements, including the purchase of state-of-the-art equipment that will streamline our operations and provide better service to our customers.*

*As we start the new fiscal year, AFC is committed to world class delivery of government financial management services. In concert with this vision, the Internet Payment Platform (IPP) is poised to be implemented within the next few months. This platform is a centralized payment information portal that allows Federal Agencies and their vendors to access information about purchase orders, invoices, and Treasury disbursed payments via the Web. This platform will replace the Payment Advice Internet Delivery (PAID) application and additional information concerning this change may be found within this edition and on our AFC website.*

*This time of year, with cooler weather, we begin to focus on family and friends as the holiday season approaches. Nevertheless, as we take time to enjoy the holiday celebrations, AFC employees will continue to be diligent to the responsibility of "on time" disbursements. The employees of AFC understand that these disbursements affect a real person at the receiving end of each payment, especially during the holidays. As we move forward in this time of change, I am grateful to our customers for the trust they have with FMS and our AFC staff.*

With best regards, Fall 2008  
Robert C. Mange



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### Special points of interest:

- CAB Baltimore, MD
- Changes in Debt and Payment Processing
- Social Security and Direct Express

# Upcoming Events

The Austin Financial Center is pleased to provide the following forums, meetings, training, and events:

## AGENCY FORUMS:

Tentatively scheduled to be held in conjunction with the Spring 2009 CAB.

- Please check our website for future dates and online registration.

[www.fms.treas.gov/afc](http://www.fms.treas.gov/afc)

## GREEN BOOK ACH SEMINARS:

No dates have been established for FY2009.

- *Green Book ACH Seminars* are primarily for financial institu-

tions. If you are interested in attending or hosting this training, please contact the AFC Help Desk at 512-342-7300.

## VA/TREASURY MEETING:

- November 5-6, 2008

For *VA/Treasury Meetings*, please contact our coordinators to obtain additional information on times and agenda.

**Joan Harper** at  
joan.harper@fms.treas.gov

**Gay Wallace** at  
gay.wallace@fms.treas.gov

**Adriana Pena** at  
adriana.pena@fms.treas.gov

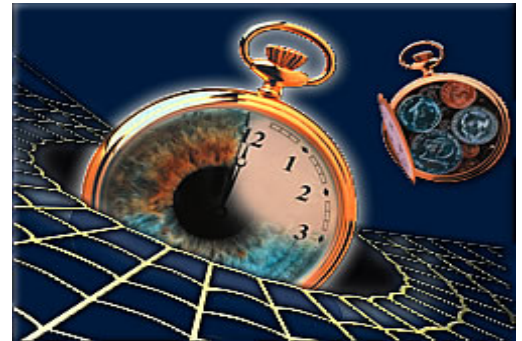
## CUSTOMER ADVISORY BOARD

### Spring 2009, Baltimore, MD

- For *Customer Advisory Board* agenda information, please check our website or contact

**Joan Harper** at  
joan.harper@fms.treas.gov

**Tabitha Guyton** at  
tabitha.guyton@fms.treas.gov



# Treasury Financial Manual (TFM)

## 2008 TFM Bulletins :

#2008-01	Retention Bulletin
#2008-02	Yearend Proprietary Reporting of Government Account Series Investments with the Bureau of the Public Debt Purchased by Agencies Using Deposit Fund Monies
#2008-03	Changes to TFM Transmittal Letter No. S2 07-02, US Government Standard General Ledger, for Fiscal 2007 and 2008
#2008-04	Current Value of Funds Rate Percentage
#2008-05	Prior-Year Adjustment Attribute Required for Federal Agencies' Centralized Trial-Balance System II Reporting
#2008-06	Yearend Closing
#2008-07	Current Value of Funds Rate Percentage

## 2008 TFM Announcements

#A-2008-01	Revised Federal Account Symbols and Titles (FAST) Book
#A-2008-02	Suspense "F" Account Discontinuance and Waiver Request Reminder
#A-2008-03	Revised Federal Account Symbols and Titles (FAST) Book
#A-2008-04	Revised Federal Account Symbols and Titles (FAST) Book
#A-2008-05	Closing Deposit Fund Accounts with Zero and Negative Balances
#A-2008-06	Revised Federal Account Symbols and Titles (FAST) Book

## 2008 TFM Transmittal Letters #643 through #646



# Changes in Payment & Debt Processing



In late November the payment and debt processing applications will be moving from Hyattsville, MD Regional Operations Center (HROC) to the Kansas City, MO Regional Operations Center (KROC). The Payment Automation Manager (PAM) will also be run at KROC. During the course of the next year, HROC will be slowly decommissioned with applications and services shifted to a new ROC, the Philadelphia, PA Regional Operations Center (PROC). All non-payment and debt applications currently performed at HROC will be transferred to HROC/PROC by the end of next year.

It is imperative that agencies who exchange bulk files with FMS have connectivity with both KROC and HROC/PROC. Exchange of payment and debt files will go to KROC while all other files will be exchanged with HROC/PROC. The FMS preferred solution for connectivity is for the agency to implement Peerless IP (PIP) connectivity. PIP enables automatic routing of properly identified files between the agency and the appropriate FMS ROC. It also allows for contingency routing if the primary processing FMS ROC is unavailable. FMS will have Point of Presence for three carriers, Sprint, AT&T, and Verizon. It is recommended that the agency also have connectivity to FMS from their emergency backup facility. If an agency is unable to obtain connectivity to KROC by January 31, 2009, payments will be delayed.

For planning purposes, when requesting Sprint T1 PIP connectivity, the agency should expect an estimated one time installation charge of \$2,500 with recurring monthly charges of \$1,000. In addition, expect a ninety day lead time from submission of service request to line installation. The following schedule is being provided to assist agencies in meeting timelines for this change:

- Contact FMS to make arrangements.....Immediately
- Transfer Payment and Dept processing to KROC.....by November 22, 2008
- Establish and test PIP connectivity.....before January 31, 2009
- Establish access.....before January 31, 2009
- Cutover to KROC for exchange of agency files.....January 31, 2009
- HROC transfer of functions to PROC completed.....December 31, 2009

For business testing the agency should contact their servicing Regional Financial Center (RFC).

For networking the agency should contact Joe Mendez, joseph.mendez@fms.treas.gov, 202-874-7099



## Access and Forms

If you have encountered problems when trying to log into the SPS, please remember that for Certifying Officers (CO) and Data Entry Operators (DEO), you must log into SPS at least once every 30 days to keep your password active.

The same condition exists for Trusted Registration Agents (TRAs). you must log into ITRA at least once every 30 days to keep your password active. Should you become locked out of either system, it can take up to forty-eight hours and several pieces of paperwork to reestablish you in the system.

If you need to obtain the following forms, please contact Hilliard Koiner, 202-874-7327

- Form 2958-Delegation of Authority
- Form 210 CO-Designation for Certifying Officer
- Form 210 DEO-Designation for Data Entry Operator

These forms should be mailed to:  
Department of the Treasury  
Attention: SPS Help Desk  
4241 NE 34th Street  
Kansas City, MO 64117

PLEASE DO NOT SEND THESE FORMS TO THE WASHINGTON ADDRESS.

Should you have any questions concerning this information, please call the SPS Help Desk, 816-414-2340.

## Application

Due to the release of Core 2 (SPS 11.0) in June, all SPS users may have experienced a slow initial login the first time they accessed SPS in mid June. Once the jar files had been downloaded (after the first login) to the users workstation or laptop, the performance should have reverted back to what the user was accustomed. This release did not feature any change in user functionality or the user's menu GUI, however, there is a new screen that will appear when the users login (see next column).

This screen will alert the users that a software update is required

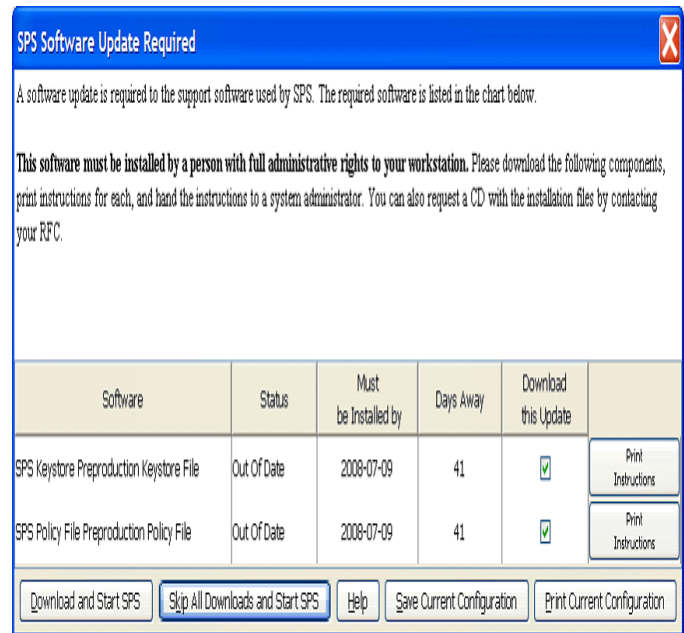


Figure 1: SPS Software Update Required Pop-up

The current release of SPS includes “Auto Distributor” functionality that warns the user with a pop-up screen similar to the one shown in Figure 1 above, to let users know that their SPS installation needs an update soon.

Note that the exact text in the “SPS Software Update Required” popup may be different from the one shown in Figure 1: the date/time of the expiry may be different and in the future, the list of expiring software items may be different and could include (Java Plug-in, SPS Keystore Production Keystore File, and SPS Policy File Production Policy File) The buttons in the “SPS Software Update Required” popup may be different from the one shown in Figure 1: the “Download and Start SPS” button may be disabled.

To update SPS installations to the latest version, end users are recommended to use the latest “SPS Installation CD” provided by your servicing RFC and follow instructions provided on that CD.

# Social Security — Put in on Plastic?

by Michelle Roberts, The Oregonian, Thursday, September 04, 2008

The Depression-era Social Security program is about to offer the latest twist on using plastic as money.

The U.S. Department of the Treasury will offer a new debit card option for federal benefits to almost two million Social Security check recipients in 12 western states, including Oregon, the agency announced Thursday.

The Direct Express Debit MasterCard will be introduced by the Treasury's Financial Management Service in Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington and Wyoming. Dallas-based Comerica Bank will issue the card.

The Treasury estimates nearly 4 million Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients do not have bank accounts, including about 600,000 in the West.

As a result, these recipients face a greater risk of check-delivery delays because of poor weather, national or local emergencies, and other problems such as lost or stolen checks. The problem was highlighted last week when Hurricane Gustav delayed tens of thousands of checks.

"In the case of Gustav, we were early releasing (checks) so people would have them before they had to leave," said Alvina McHale, legislative and public affairs director for the Financial Management Service. "But people were still cut off from their money because the post offices were closing early because of the evacuation."

About 10.3 million senior citizens,

people with disabilities and others rely on paper checks for Social Security and SSI payments. Nearly 58,000 checks are sent to Portland-area residents each month. Last year, 700,000 SSI and Social Security checks were lost or stolen, including 60,000 cases of fraud, McHale said.



Oregon residents without bank accounts now have a user-friendly, practical alternative to paper checks for their monthly federal benefit payments," said Abbie Loftus, deputy director of the Treasury's Regional Financial Center in San Francisco. "Getting Social Security payments on the Direct Express card is safer, easier, and more convenient than paper checks, and provides immediate access to funds — so people who receive federal benefits have more time to spend on the things they need or want to do."

The Treasury tested the program in four states in 2007. "It was a card that didn't have all the features that this later one does," McHale said. "Still, the reaction to the card was positive. Eighty-eight percent of people said they'd recommend it to family or friends."

But McHale doesn't know whether it will immediately appeal to everyone.

"A lot of it is emotional attachment — (people) love paper checks," McHale said, "They love to hold the. Then they lose them. We appreciate and acknowledge that emotional attachment, but we want people to know what that is costing them in terms of security of their money. That's not a good thing."

Starting April 23, the Treasury offered an enhanced card to a limited number of people in the four pilot states. This month, nearly 2 million Social Security recipients in a dozen western states will receive information about the debit-card option with their September checks.

The Direct Express card has no sign-up fee and no bank account or credit check is required to enroll. Cardholders can make purchases, pay bills and get cash at thousands of ATM and retail locations nationwide.

"You have your PIN number and can get cash, not just through an ATM, but at point of sale with merchants," McHale said. "And there's no overdraft fees because it's impossible to overdraft. When your money's gone, the card doesn't work again until next month's funds are put on it."

McHale said the move would save the Social Security Trust Fund 88 cents for every check it no longer has to mail. "Every month there's 10.3 million paper checks. This move will save the trust fund, if everyone did this, \$107 million annually."



## Canada Direct Deposit Campaign

The Austin Financial Center (AFC) and FMS Headquarters, in partnership with the Social Security Administration, are launching a campaign to aggressively promote the conversion of approximately 17,000 Social Security check benefit payments to direct deposit. This particular Go Direct Campaign is targeting Canada where statistics show this international country receives the highest volume of printed SSA benefit checks mailed to recipients.

The Go Direct Canada campaign is

expected to launch in November 2008 and will seek to educate and promote an increase to the number of Direct Deposits in Canada. On November 7<sup>th</sup>, AFC will mail out a solicitation letter and form to Social Security benefit check recipients requesting that they consider signing up for direct deposit.

In addition to being a safe, secure, and efficient way to receive the timely deposit of benefit payments, the direct deposit offers a significant cost savings to taxpayers. The Treasury mails about 160 million benefit checks a year, at an additional annual cost of \$100 million in postage, printing, and other costs. Treasury has determined that for every check pay-

ment converted to Direct Deposit, the government saves 62 cents. When benefit recipients choose direct deposit over a paper check, there is a substantial savings to the government.

The campaign makes it easy for people to sign up for direct deposit. They can call the GO DIRECT helpline at 800-333-1795, visit [www.GoDirect.org](http://www.GoDirect.org) to sign up online, or submit the form provided to their local financial institution or Social Security Administration office.

## Internet Payment Platform (IPP)

As most of you are aware, in June 2008, the Payment Advice Internet Delivery (PAID) system suspended all new registration and the ability for existing users to change their level of service. This has been in preparation for the transition from PAID to our new system, the Internet Payment Platform (IPP).

The IPP is a new web-based information service from the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Financial Management Service (FMS) that will handle government-wide electronic purchase orders, invoicing, and payment information service at no charge to the customer. The implementation date for IPP is getting closer, but in the meantime users will continue to have access to their PAID services.

To see how this transition is going, obtain additional information, or learn more about IPP, please visit our web site at [www.ipp.gov](http://www.ipp.gov).



# AFC Help Desk: Issue and Resolution

512-342-7300

◆ **Issue:** Consistently certain paying agencies transfer or refer their customers, who are calling to resolve a payment problem, to our Austin Financial Center (AFC) Help Desk. The customer then assumes that the Help Desk Agent is able to resolve their payment problem and becomes further distraught when told they will need to contact their paying agency. The customer soon feels they are being volleyed between federal agencies with no resolution to their problem.

◆ **Resolution:** The paying agency must understand that AFC is their disbursing agency and entirely dependent upon the paying agency's submissions to us for making or reissuing a payment, which might be the result of a cancelled and returned payment. If the paying agency is unable to locate information concerning their customer's payment, the agency should contact our help desk to ensure that we have received the payment schedule and issued the payment. At the same time the agency should verify the payment information. The paying agency should then be able to contact the customer with current payment information and a legitimate answer as to how they will be resolving the customers payment issue.



## Notification of Change (NOC)

The Notification of Change (NOC) process is the method used by Financial Institutions (FI) to notify a federal agency to change and/or correct account information for federal government transactions processed through the Automated Clearing House (ACH). NOCs are used to correct routing numbers, account numbers, transaction codes, or all three. NOCs are used for payments that are made on a recurring basis, such as a benefit or other payment type, which could be federal salary or vendor/miscellaneous. NOCs are not used for correcting information on one time payments, such as tax refunds.

When a payment is received at a FI and cannot be posted due to incorrect account information, as in the event of a bank merger, the FI will initiate an NOC to notify the agency that the information is incorrect and should be changed. The FI has the option to post the payment to an account that is owned by the payee and then initiate an NOC to change the account information, or the FI may return the payment. If the FI returns the payment, this will cause a delay in payment to the recipient. If an NOC is received by a federal agency for a government payment, the payment information should be corrected prior to initiating another payment to the recipient in order to avoid any hardship to the recipient.

Should you have questions concerning this topic, please contact our AFC Help Desk, 512-342-7300



Department of the Treasury  
Financial Management Service  
Austin Financial Center

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The Austin Financial Center (AFC) was established in 1969 as a disbursing office for the Financial Management Service (FMS), a bureau of the Department of the Treasury. In 1984, the AFC became one of five FMS Regional Financial Centers (RFC). Each RFC is responsible for the disbursement of public monies on behalf of federal civilian agencies. The regional system was developed to bring agency operations and services closer to its customers.

The AFC is not only responsible for services within our five-state region, which includes Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas, but also provides various services to customers worldwide.

The mission of the AFC is to be ever vigilant in serving the public trust by advancing all facets of payment services.

## On time every time!

## Austin Financial Center Services

- Issue payments, by check or electronic funds transfer (EFT), on behalf of federal agencies to recipients throughout the United States and other countries where U.S. citizens may be living abroad.
- Process claims and inquiries related to EFT payments and government checks that have been returned, lost, or stolen.
- Process Explanation of Benefits (EOB's) for VA payments.
- Implement and monitor cash/credit management, debt collection, and accounting programs for federal agencies.
- Serve as a financial consultant and advisor to federal, state, and local governments, the financial community, and the Federal Reserve System to ensure that FMS initiatives are carried out in a practical, efficient, and effective manner.
- Provide training on existing and new programs and initiatives through workshops or seminars that are designed to meet the needs of our customers.

