

Unaccompanied Support

Department provides tangible, intangible benefits /// *By Ed Warner*

The Department's support for employees on unaccompanied tours is both concrete—certain pay and tour-length incentives apply—and responsive to uncertainty; that is, to how the employee may be affected by serving in a potentially hazardous situation while away from family members.

The concrete aspects are spelled out in the Service Recognition Package for Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan, the “AIP posts” that comprise most unaccompanied tours. For instance, tours at the U.S. embassies in Baghdad and Kabul are generally one year and include two rest and recuperation breaks for every year of service. The differential and

danger pay combined mean an employee receives up to a 70 percent pay increase while at either post. Employees may also benefit afterward when bidding for onward postings.

The Department's pay at unaccompanied posts is among the best of any federal agency. The Department is working to gain congressional passage of legislation to ensure that other agencies that send employees to designated zones of armed conflict have similar authority to offer pay incentives. Pay uniformity “increases morale—it’s a basic fairness issue—and federal employees doing similar work under similar conditions should be similarly compensated,”

said Karen Krueger, the Bureau of Human Resources official heading the Department's role with the initiative.

Incentives Attract

The Department recently surveyed the entire Foreign Service on its monetary and nonmonetary incentives for the AIP posts. The nearly 3,500 officers who responded widely support the current incentives, and many who had served at AIP posts also said they were motivated by public service or the value of the work, reported Steve Blake, acting deputy director of HR's Office of Career Development and Assignments. Blake said his



Dr. David Panakkal, acting director of MED's Deployment Stress Management Program, contemplates the worldwide locations of unaccompanied tours.



Michele Siders, left, a senior advisor in HR's Office of Career Development and Assignments, discusses a report with Steve Blake, the office's acting deputy director.

office's survey found the chief impediment to serving on an unaccompanied tour was separation from family.

The Department has at least 13 unaccompanied posts, including several where no children are allowed and, with exceptions, eligible family members can come along only if the Bureau of Management agrees (see table). However, the six AIP posts are among the Department's busiest, and one AIP post, the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, is one of the Department's largest embassies. These factors increase the likelihood that Foreign Service officers will serve at an unaccompanied post during their careers. HR estimates there are between 900 and 1,000 employees at unaccompanied posts, roughly five times the 2001 level.

Protecting Employees

Beyond the monetary benefits, there are a host of services to prevent unaccompanied tours from causing long-term emotional harm. The chief Department units involved are the Family Liaison Office, Office of Medical Services and Foreign Service Institute, which hosts the predeparture and returnee briefings (see related story).

FLO emphasizes information on what to expect, such as a decision tree questionnaire for prospective bidders to assess whether such

a tour is right for them. FLO keeps in touch with both employees and families once the employee arrives at post.

Bridget Roddy, FLO's former unaccompanied tours officer, said the office covers all agencies' employees and all members of a family, not just the employee's spouse and children. For singles with and without children, FLO gets their parents and siblings involved, she said. FLO also has contracted with a mental health services company that provides a Web portal and hotline and offers telephone-based and face-to-face counseling sessions, even for family members outside the Washington, D.C., area. MED's Employee Consultation Services also provides counseling services.

FLO's "virtual orientations" for those headed to unaccompanied tours occur at Main State but are simulcast online to let family members participate. FLO also does general morale-boosting, said Office Director Leslie Teixeira, noting that it recently arranged for "well-wisher" banners at Main State for employees to sign and send greetings to colleagues serving at AIP posts.

MED's services focus on addressing potential emotional problems. One of its strategies is placing significant medical staff at AIP posts, said MED Director Dr. Thomas

UNACCOMPANIED POSTS

AFGHANISTAN: Kabul*

IRAQ: Baghdad*

PAKISTAN: Islamabad*, Karachi, Lahore*, Peshawar*

SUDAN: Juba

Adult EFM's Only

CHAD: N'Djamena**

KOSOVO: Pristina

LEBANON: Beirut

SUDAN: Khartoum

YEMEN: Sanaa

Adult EFM's & Minors Under Age 5

ALGERIA: Algiers

*Adult EFM accompaniment authorized pending Management Bureau approval on a case-by-case basis

**EFMs 21 and older permitted

Source: Bureau of Human Resources

Yun. Baghdad and Kabul each have a regional medical officer and two Foreign Service health practitioners. There is a FSHP in Peshawar and one will soon be in place in Karachi. Mission Iraq also has a mental health social worker and psychologist, and the U.S. Embassy in Kabul has a social worker.

PTSD Uncommon

The buzzword associated with some tours at unaccompanied posts is post-traumatic stress disorder, but Yun said its incidence is low. That's because PTSD is associated with being in life-threatening danger or witnessing someone in such danger, explained David Panakkal, acting director of MED's Deployment Stress Management Program.

A more common concern, Panakkal said, is "garden-variety depression." To combat stress-related problems, Panakkal advised employees to take the predeparture resiliency training offered jointly by MED and FSI, and urged those headed for high-stress tours to be in good shape physically and have hobbies and connections with friends.

Panakkal said health units at AIP posts monitor for stress-related ailments on arrival, during and at the conclusion of the employee's tour. While an employee can be medically evacuated if the emotional problem is big enough, he said problems can arise long after the employee returns home.

MED's Deployment Stress Management Program offers a support group for employees returning from or headed to unaccompanied or high-threat posts (*State Magazine*, June 2008). MED's Web site, http://med.state.gov/mentalhealth_disaster.htm, also offers extensive information for those dealing with stress. ■

The author is deputy editor of State Magazine.

Green Defenders

Environment Directorate Takes on Global Challenges /// *By Environmental Directorate Team*

Trekking through the Borneo rainforest to monitor logging operations, tracking coral reef damage in Southeast Asia or creating programs to tackle climate change are just some of the varied and challenging tasks of the three offices in the Environment Directorate of the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs.

Assistant Secretary Dan Clune, the Environment Directorate's officers are experienced diplomats, scientists and specialized experts, and many return to serve a second or third tour.

"People have a personal avocation toward the issues we cover and feel that they can make a real difference," said Christine

substances, the directorate's officers have succeeded in finding workable solutions that balance and advance U.S. interests on social, environmental and economic issues.

The Environment Directorate is actively engaged in a number of negotiations. Some are well known, such as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. Others are less familiar, such as the Rotterdam, Basil and Stockholm conventions on the international trade of hazardous chemicals and pesticides, and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

A newer organization is the International Renewable Energy Agency, consisting of 140 countries. OES/EGC is actively engaged in ensuring the agency's success in increasing the diffusion of renewable energy technologies around the world.

Teamwork's Role

During last December's two-week session of the UNFCCC 15th Conference of the Parties, where numerous parallel negotiations occurred, OES/EGC's Amanda Vockerodt was one of the U.S. negotiators and found the experience fascinating, challenging and exhausting.

"Many times, parties arrive at a compromise during the high-level segment at the end of the negotiations, which is what happened in Copenhagen," she said. "What the public doesn't always realize, however, is that these compromises were only possible after extensive, complex negotiations undertaken over many hours in the months before the heads of state arrived and agreed to the Copenhagen Accord."

Since April, OES/EGC and the Special Envoy's office have attended preparatory negotiating sessions for the next UNFCCC ministerial meeting in Mexico in November. These negotiations will help shape the development and implementation of consensus measures to address global climate change and clean-energy solutions, as well as efforts on adaptation and land-use cooperation.

The Environment Directorate's forte is developing programs that build strong, long-lasting partnerships between disparate

OES Assistant Secretary Kerri-Ann Jones, center, tours the site of the future International Renewable Energy Agency headquarters in Masdar City, United Arab Emirates.



The directorate includes the Office of Global Change, which works with the Office of the Special Envoy for Climate Change on international negotiations and discussions under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate and other negotiations. It also includes the Office of Environmental Policy, which focuses on air pollution, toxic chemicals, hazardous waste, water resources, trade/environment linkages, sustainable development and the environmental work of multilateral organizations. The third component is the Office of Ecology and Natural Resource Conservation, which addresses biodiversity, ecology and trade and forest issues.

According to OES Principal Deputy As-

Dawson, director of OES/ENRC, who has returned to the bureau several times after forays outside the Department.

Veteran Leader

Leading this group of 65 employees is OES veteran Deputy Assistant Secretary Daniel Reifsnyder, who has served in all three OES directorates in his 20-plus-year Department career.

"Serving in this directorate and the bureau in general changes how you view the environment and its integral role in world peace and prosperity, which is true today more than ever before," he said.

Through DAS Reifsnyder's leadership on a number of negotiations, including the Montreal Protocol on ozone-depleting



stakeholders. This requires a hands-on, person-to-person approach. For instance, Aaron Spencer in OES/ENV's Environment and Trade Division traveled four hours in the back of a truck over unpaved roads to a remote Nicaraguan village to supervise an organic cacao certification program. He saw how environmental good governance can translate into economic prosperity through higher market prices for organically

grown products, while helping preserve the biodiversity of endangered ecosystems.

"Partnerships between corporations and nongovernmental organizations, which have the subject-matter knowledge, leverage key resources, create buy-in and reinforce the successes of environmentally and economically sound business practices," said Rob Wing, director of the Environment and Trade Division.

Local Encouragement

Many of the Directorate's programs encourage local communities to take responsibility for their environment and develop a sense of ownership for projects. OES/ENRC leads U.S. participation in the International Coral Reef Initiative, whose members work together to conserve coral reefs globally. Through the initiative, OES/ENRC helped organize the Coral Reef



Clockwise from above: Trigg Talley, director of the Office of Global Change, meets with Office Management Specialist Denise Goode; Willem Brakel, director of the Office of Environmental Policy, points out the development of a hole in the ozone layer; Office of Environmental Policy staffers Abby Lindsay, left, and Jacob Palley mount a poster in their office.





Clockwise from above: OES Deputy Assistant Secretary Daniel Reifsnyder leads the Environmental Directorate; Susan Gardner, senior foreign affairs officer in the Office of Environmental Policy, takes a break from memo-writing; Christine Dawson, director of the Office of Ecology and Natural Resource Conservation, and her deputy, Phillip Antweiler, have the whole world in their hands.



Crime Scene Investigation Program to train local coral reef managers, ecologists and law enforcement officials on investigating, monitoring and prosecuting coral reef damage. While attending a workshop, OES/ENRC officer Kelly Milton witnessed how knowledge transfer gives local citizens and officials the tools to assume greater stewardship of their environment.

Enforcement Network, which cooperatively investigates, prosecutes and penalizes those engaged in illegally trafficking in wildlife.

The Directorate works closely with other Department offices and U.S. agencies, such as the U.S. Agency for International Development, as well as such international organizations as the World Bank, the Global Environment Facility, World Wildlife Fund

As a result, we scale up our programs and the impact they have to inspire real change.”

“These issues have always been important, but have tended to be seen as niche concerns best left to specialists,” said Willem Brakel, Director of OES/ENV. “Now, we see a new focus and emphasis on environment and sustainable development as central to achieving our foreign policy objectives.”



Office of Global Change staff members Amanda Vockerodt, left, and Elizabeth Murphy discuss a draft report.

OES/ENRC is leading similar environmental partnerships on forest conservation through the Heart of Borneo Initiative in Southeast Asia and the Congo Basin Forest Partnership in Central Africa, which has more than 50 stakeholders. One of the office’s biggest successes has been its work with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Wildlife

and Conservation International.

Pointing to the Central America-Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement as an example of the crucial role partnerships play in an initiative, Spencer said, “Acting alone, the United States is one link in a long chain of stakeholders. But when we partner with others, we extend and strengthen the connections.

Water Concerns

One environmental issue that has remained largely under the radar is water. However, in remarks made on World Water Day in March, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton emphasized that water is a key foreign policy and national security issue. Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs Maria Otero also has made water one of her signature issues, traveling widely to address water-related tensions and needs, including to the Middle East this past April.

According to OES Assistant Secretary Kerri-Ann Jones, the Environment Directorate’s mission is “being at the heart of some of the most pressing issues of the day as America retakes its leadership on environment and health, and marshalling science to meet these challenges and expand human potential.”

Be it air, water, plant or animal, Environment Directorate officers are dedicated to protecting the earth’s natural resources daily. To achieve that mission, the directorate has a diverse team with a unique mix of skills and expertise, from political science to natural science, from diplomacy to data, and from economics to ecosystems. ■

This article was a team effort of the Environment Directorate.

U.S. Center Reaches Audiences Worldwide By Elizabeth Murphy

During December’s global climate change conference in Copenhagen, the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs and the Office of the Special Envoy for Climate Change organized the U.S. Center, an outreach initiative that provided a platform for 35,000 conference attendees to learn about U.S. climate actions through more than 70 sessions on critical initiatives, policies and scientific research.

The sessions featured U.S. and international leaders in the fight against climate change, including five Cabinet secretaries, senior White House and State Department officials and representatives from U.S. agencies, academic institutions, nongovernmental organizations and private-sector entities. Topics highlighted the variety of U.S. climate programs and scientific research and underscored strong U.S. actions to combat climate change.

“I can’t tell you how excited everyone was when [the master of ceremonies] said there was a question from San Salvador, El Salvador,” said a webchat participant about a U.S. Center session at the conference on improved air pollution control. “I really liked this a lot!”

To broaden the U.S. Center’s reach beyond the conference, OES worked with the Bureau of International Information Programs and embassies and consulates to ensure that live webcasts and digital video conferences of selected programming reached audiences in more than 80 countries worldwide, including countries from lower-bandwidth environments. Thousands of virtual participants reacted positively to center programming, resulting in numerous articles and blog postings as well as countless conversations among leading scientists, policymakers and other key climate contacts.

The author is an outreach officer in ECA’s Cultural Programs Division.