



FEMA

**Puerto Rico NPSC
Questions and Answers
October 8, 2008**

- 1. If there was a surplus of employees and not enough work, why not a regular release, where only a skeleton crew remains until a disaster occurs?**

In July, the readiness staffing plan was established in order to keep all PR-NPSC employees Registration Intake skills fresh, which would help ensure a readiness level in the event that disaster activity warrants a recall of staff.

- 2. Why establish a rotation of all HSS which will undoubtedly cause them to resign or to be terminated when they refuse to come to work two weeks out of every five months?**

The intention of the staff rotation was to encourage employee retention and readiness. However, it is understandable that some employees would seek alternative employment due to the unstable work environment at the PR-NPSC at this time.

- 3. Would I be subject to termination or resignation if I am unavailable at the time of the rotation?**

Since Hurricanes Gustav and Ike, most PR-NPSCs employees have been recalled to work; therefore this question is no longer pertinent. However, please know that while the policy states that employees in release status are required to report to work when recalled, we would have made every effort to work with each employee to ensure you remained on the cadre if you chose to do so, if you could not return to work for your two week rotation.

- 4. What makes the cost of fixing the PRNPSC so prohibitive compared to the other NPSCs? Why not utilize facilities already in place, like the old ATT call center in Cayey or any of the military installations not used due to closings, such as Sabana Seca?**

Repair costs to the PR-NPSC facility are not prohibitive. Repairs are on-going and expected to be complete by October. The other NPSC facilities are not in need of repair at this time. A decision on the long-term future of the PR-NPSC has not yet been made. As such, establishing operations at another facility has been and will continue to be a consideration.

- 5. In order to transfer to a DAE status, do I need to inform anyone in the workforce area or do I just approach the region? What is the step by step procedure to become a DAE (my request)? What happens with my accumulated benefits (annual and sick leave, TSP, medical, etc.) once I become a DAE?**

If you are interested in becoming a DAE with the Regions, please let Maggie De-La-Matta (787-283-5507) know and identify the Region for which you are interesting in working. We will inform the Region of your interest. Please contact Jeanette Martinez-Cintron for a Fact Sheet for CORE Employees Converting to DAEs.

The region or HQ Cadre has to initiate the paperwork (SF-52) to convert an employee of the PR-NPSC to a DAE position. If that conversion is done with no break in service or with a break in service of no more than three days then as a DAE, the employee will be eligible to keep their FEHB, TSP, and FERS benefits. The employee will lose FEGLI coverage when moved to DAE because the work schedule will change to intermittent. If the conversion process causes a break in service of longer than three days, then all benefits cease. We will make every effort to work with transferring staff so as to avoid a break in service of greater than three days.

- 6. CTAP & ICTAP Program 62 FR 31320, June 9, 1997 § 330.601 Purpose**

- a. This subpart implements the President's memorandum of September 12, 1995, to establish agency Career Transition Assistance Plans for Federal employees during a period of severe Federal downsizing. It is the policy of the United States Government to provide services to help surplus and displaced Federal employees take charge of their own careers and find other job offers, either within the Federal Government or in the private sector.**

- b. Would it be possible to check if we could be eligible for this benefit?**

Unfortunately, this part of the federal regulation applies only to a current career or career- conditional competitive service employee. CORE and DAE employees are Excepted Service appointments and are not considered Career Conditional employees. They are therefore not eligible for these benefits. (See definition of displaced employee 5 CFR §330.604 and 703)

- 7. Why did they not consider the option of giving us the “news” two months ago, in order for us to have 2 months of administrative leave and have a chance to search for other employment opportunities?**

Between the temporary closure of the facility on May 16 and the July 15, 2008 All-Hands meeting, management carefully worked through the issues impacting operations at the PR-NPSC. Once the decision was made to repair the facility and to implement a readiness staffing level, it was communicated to staff without delay.

8. Why a release in times where the processing queues is so high?

At the time of the releases, the NPSC staffing level was more than adequate to address the call center and casework activity.

9. Why not a change of facility?

A decision on the long-term future of the PR-NPSC has not yet been made. As such, establishing operations at another facility has been and will continue to be among the many options under consideration.

10. Why do they consider the IPR for everything but not for the order of releases?

The IPR was used as one of the determining factors for the lack of work releases in November 2006 and March 2007.

The releases that occurred in July 2008 at the PR-NPSC were not due to lack of work, but due to the occupancy limits that were placed on the facility. Employee performance did not contribute to the decision to release staff at the PR-NPSC because all HSS employees were released.

11. Why do we have various statements from Monty explaining the reasons for which the facility will be reduced but no specific reason?

Monty LeMaire explained the circumstances that led to the decision to limit operations at the PR-NPSC during the All-Hands meeting on July 15, 2008. In fact, there was not one specific reason, but he shared a number of reasons that are explained in the July 15, 2008 memo.

12. Why did they not provide the HSS's with the chance of relocation to one of the other NPSCs until the facility was finished?

At the time of the release in July, disaster activity did not warrant the need for additional HSS staffing at the other NPSCs. In response to Hurricanes Gustav and Ike, several PR-NPSC employees have been deployed to the MD, TX and VA-NPSCs and to the field as well as FEMA Headquarters.

13. Since when were they contemplating the releases?

Following the suspension of operations on May 16, 2006 due to the Fire and Life Safety review, various options were developed for the PR-NPSC. As no decision regarding the future of the NPSC was forthcoming and we were unable to keep employees on administrative leave indefinitely, it became apparent that releases would be necessary.

14. If cost is a factor, are they going to use the funds from the pay checks of 300 employees to fix the center and bring us back?

No. Payroll funding will not be used. An appropriate funding source has been secured to complete the necessary repairs.

15. What are the specific problems the center is encountering?

The deficiencies identified by the Facilities Management and Services Division were related to egress in the event of emergency, access for emergency vehicles, fire alarm system deficiencies, security lock functionality and fire hazard concerns.

16. What is the estimated cost to fix the center vs. the cost of relocating?

The repairs necessary to re-occupy the building are estimated to cost \$75,000. The estimated up-front cost of establishing a new facility is approximately \$8,920,000.

17. In the event of a “big disaster” where are they going to station 300 employees? Why can’t they station us where they would if a “big disaster” happens?

Once repairs are complete, staffing at the PR-NPSC may be increased above the readiness staffing level. However, until a decision is made about the occupancy limit at the PR-NPSC, PR-NPSC employees are deployed to our other NPSCs.

18. Why aren’t they reducing all other NPSCs as well?

We don’t have safety issues at the other NPSCs; therefore there is no need to reduce operations elsewhere. Staffing was reduced at the PR-NPSC due to the safety issues cited in the Fire and Life Safety report issued by the Facilities Management and Services Division.

19. How many employees are there in each NPSC? Virginia, Maryland and Texas?

Below you will find the staffing level at each NPSC as of October 1, 2008. These numbers do not include the PR-NPSC staff temporarily working at the NPSCs.

Texas	575
Virginia	353
Maryland	333

20. What are they using the information gathered in the IPR of all NPSC’s for?

The IPR is a performance measurement tool that contributes to the formulation of HSS performance appraisals and the performance management activities of the supervisor.

21. Is it viable to release people from the best performing center?

Employee performance did not contribute to the decision to release staff at the PR-NPSC.

22. What do they have planned for the next months pertaining to the excessive work of processing queues once FEMA leaves Wisconsin?

All NPSC production staff is currently fully engaged in the workload associated with Hurricanes Gustav and Ike. It is anticipated that this will keep staff occupied for a number of months. As usual, as workload decreased, NPSC management will make decisions about staffing levels and releases.

23. Why do all changes affect the PRNPSC over all other NPSC'S?

The NPSC's are a dynamic enterprise and large staffing and structural changes have occurred several times throughout its inception. For example, in 2005 MD-NPSC went through a large reorganization. The agency is currently taking a look at the NPSC enterprise as a whole and determining our post Katrina capacity, among other things.

24. Isn't the FEMA mission to have the best employees, with the best program knowledge and least processing errors to handle disaster applications?

We want all of our NPSC employees to have great program knowledge and complete their job with a high degree of excellence. However, job performance was not a determining factor when doing staff releases at the PR-NPSC.

25. What is the rate in performance of HSS's from all 4 NPSC's? Where does PRNPSC stand in terms of IPR vs. all other 3 NPSC's?

The composite IPR scores for the first three quarters of FY 08 are as follows: MD – 3.95, PR – 4.40, TX – 4.45, VA – 3.45.

26. Ms. Mayra Lopez de Victoria stated in the newspaper that we can request to be reassigned to another place outside Puerto Rico. Are we going to be relocated in the United States?

We will make every effort to facilitate transfers to other facilities. We have already received a number of requests for transfers to other NPSCs. A memo has been distributed regarding transfers to other NPSCs that provides information about the process.

27. It was stated in the news that FEMA will open in the state of Florida, is this true? If it is, can we be relocated to Florida?

There are no plans to open another NPSC. If employees are interested in transferring to one of the other NPSCs or to another FEMA facility, including the Florida Long Term Recovery Center, we will make every effort to assist.

28. What is the criterion that was used to determine the PR NPSC Program Specialist's were going to be placed into Non-Pay status as the whole NPSC?

Implementation of readiness staffing levels at the PR-NPSC in July required the deployment of only a small number of Human Service Specialists at any given time, therefore a decision was made to release all but a very few PR-NPSC employees, including the Program Specialists. Contributing to this decision was the fact that in July there were ample Program Specialists at the other NPSCs to support the NPSC workload associated with the NCT Assistance Group.

29. Which is the specific reason for denying relocation to the PRNPSC Program Specialists to other facilities?

FEMA does not pay relocation expenses for CORE employees, even when their positions have been transferred to other facilities. As stated above, if NPSC employees are interested in transferring to one of the other NPSCs or to another FEMA facility, we will make every effort to assist. Relocation expenses will be the responsibility of the employee.

30. Are we going to be able to get access to the filing cabinets?

Employees being released into non-pay non-duty status will be given an opportunity to collect personal items before being released. If you still have items from your filing cabinet, we can make arrangement for you to enter the facility to get your things.

31. Can we have a copy of our Employee File?

Yes. Please contact your Maggie De-la-Matta or Janette Martinez-Cintron for assistance.

32. Do we lose our employee CORE status?

Not at this time.

33. Are we going to receive a Recommendation Letter?

If requested, a recommendation letter will be provided to you at the discretion of the supervisor.

34. What happens to our benefits (accumulated leave, health insurance) when we go into non duty, non-pay status?

Long Term Care Insurance

You should contact the Long Term care partners to make the appropriate arrangements to continue the payment of the premiums. If you stop making premium payments during the time that you are in non-pay status your coverage will end. Once you return to pay status, if you have made arrangements to continue your coverage, the regular premium for that pay period will be withheld.

Dental and Vision

You should contact Benefeds to make appropriate arrangements to continue the payment of the premiums. If you stop making premium payments, your coverage will end. Once you return to pay status, if you have made arrangements to continue your coverage, then the regular deduction for that pay period will be withheld.

Flexible Spending Account

You should contact the FSAFEDS contractor to discuss the option of pre-paying your account. The toll-free number is: 1-877-372-3337 or e-mail FSAFED@shps.com. Your health care FSA will be frozen during periods of non-pay status, unless you have prepaid your account. If your account is frozen, then you cannot be reimbursed for eligible expenses incurred during the period of non-pay status. Dependent care expenses can only be reimbursed if you must incur the expenses as a result of you and your spouse needing to work, look for work, or attend school full time during the period of non-pay status. Once you return to pay status then the regular deduction for that pay period will be withheld.

FEHB

You will have a 31 day extension of coverage or conversion rights upon entry into non-pay, non-duty status. You may continue coverage for up to 365 days of leave without pay unless you want it to terminate or do not respond to your employing office's notice about continuing coverage during a period of LWOP status. You **MUST** pay the employee share of premiums for every pay period that your enrollment continues. Once you return to pay status the regular premium for that pay period will be withheld. If you are released to non-pay, non-duty status without remaining in pay status for four months then the time that you worked is not included in the 365 days of non-pay, non-duty status. If you are in pay status for four months

or longer and are then released to non-pay, non-duty status, then the 365 days begin again during which the agency pays the government share of FEHB premiums. However, your enrollment will terminate at the end of the pay period which includes the 365th day in consecutive non-pay status.

FEGLI

Your FEGLI coverage continues during your first 12 months in non pay status. No premium payments are required, unless you are receiving Workers' Compensation. Once you return to pay status then the regular deduction for that pay period will be withheld. If you are released to non-pay, non-duty status without remaining in pay status for four months then the time that you worked is not included in the 365 days of non-pay, non-duty status. If you are in pay status for four months or longer and are then released to non-pay, non-duty status, then the 12 months begin again during which the agency pays your FEGLI premiums.

Your life insurance coverage terminates at the end of this 12-month period, with a 31-day extension of coverage and right to convert to an individual policy.

TSP

You may only make contributions to the TSP while in a pay status. Matching Agency contributions and the 1% Agency automatic contribution will not continue if you are not in a pay status. Missed TSP contributions cannot be "repaid" to cover periods of nonpay status. TSP loan payments can be suspended for up to 1 year for employees in an approved nonpay status. TSP contributions will only be withheld during periods when you are actually in a pay status.

You may not withdraw your TSP account until separation from Federal service. A TSP separation is 31 days. If you are rehired and your break in service is less than 31 days, you are not eligible to withdraw your TSP account.

If an employee has a TSP loan and enters a non-pay status a TSP-41 will need to be completed by the Agency and sent to TSP and then when they return to a pay status the same form must be sent to TSP.

Leave

Annual and Sick leave will be accrued only while in pay status. Lump Sum Payment of Annual leave is only paid out when employee separates from the agency. Sick leave will remain on the books.