

# Casual Payment Center Newsletter

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## A Successful First Year

As the Casual Payment Center (CPC) for BIA, BLM and FWS concludes its first year, we would like to share our experiences and accomplishments as well as keep the field informed.

Our goal is to share stories, statistics, new information and suggestions regarding casual hires to a large, national field encompassing three agencies.

Much work has been put in to establish a payment center, and it has been an interesting experience undertaking such a new and expansive workload.

Since the conception of the CPC on January 3, 2005, we immediately set up a clear mission statement:

*The principal mission of the CPC is the delivery of excellent customer service in the cost effective and prompt processing of payment of casual hires for the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS).*



The Federal Personnel/Payroll System (FPPS) is where all information is entered and tracked for payment processing in the CPC. There are desk manuals on every station in our office, including office guidelines, step-by-step procedures for every task, agency-specific codes and guidelines, and of course, the Pay Plan for Emergency Workers.

As our main goal is to provide excellent customer service, we certainly welcome any suggestions from the field that would improve our office. The goal of this quarterly newsletter is to provide customer service by sharing information with you in a concise report. Enjoy!

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May 9, 2006

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# History

Many changes in the payment process for Emergency Firefighters (EFF) have occurred over the past several years. One major change took place in 2002 when the Department of the Interior directed Bureaus to phase out the use of ADO checks for the payment of EFF. In March of 2003, the DOI National Business Center enhanced the EFF/Vendor Pay program to provide for payments to be made by direct deposit and Treasury-issued checks. The most significant change, the redesign of the system took place January 2, 2005.

## FPPS IMPLEMENTATION

In 2002 the DOI National Business Center was contracted to do a study for the redesign of the current EFFPay/Vendor System. The findings of the study suggested the system be moved to the FPPS (Federal Personnel/Payroll System) platform and not include Vendor payments. This was approved by all federal fire agencies in July of 2002 and a group began work on the redesign of a new system. It has had an enormous impact on the EFF Pay program and business practices.

Through the redesign EFF Pay is now housed on the FPPS (Federal Personnel Pay System) and is no longer a stand alone system. On January 02, 2005 the system became operational for all agencies (FS, BLM, NPS, BIA, FWS).

## ADVANTAGES FOR A NEW SYSTEM AND CENTRALIZED CPC

A considerable amount of time and coordination is needed for audits and data entry. Because processing casual pay was a collateral duty, many of the Casual Pay Specialists/ADOs performed the work on overtime, after hours or on weekends and holidays which added cost to the incident and/or fuels project.

A Centralized Casual Payment Center provides for consistent application of payment procedures and business policies. With an established organization we find that the work can be managed more efficiently meeting the needs of the field. The CPC provides an avenue to recognize the volume of work and true cost of doing business and allows us to provide our customers one-stop-shopping.

## Who's Who at the CPC

Kristy Valentine Center Manager

Sarah Fisher Assistant Center Manager  
Detailed from June-October from NIFC-USFS

The CPC has employed a total of **35** seasonals this year hired by the contract company IAP World Services out of Cape Canaveral, FL.

The following contractors have acted as staff **Leads** since the conception of the CPC in January 2005. Lead responsibilities include, but are not limited to: audit and certify payroll, guide and train basics, and communicate with the field regarding issues, lost checks and other inquiries.

- Kylee Hutchins Acts as the Issue Lead.
- Tina McMullen Handles Lost Checks.
- Simi Torres Helps develop procedures, statistics and reports.
- Sheri Phariss Handled SSN merges, contact lists and communication with Denver.
- Sandra Braseth Joined us in April, and became a Lead in May. Handles SSN merges and corrections.
- Suzie Snead Joined us from May through September, helping out with lost checks during the busy season.
- Mary Lingg Joined us from May through September as a Lead.

Several **Basics** have been hired to do the majority of data entry, filing, mail and every-day CPC tasks that are essential to successful, smooth and accurate output. Here are a few that have spent a lot of time and commitment processing EFF payroll this year:

- Amber Mack
- Brandon Labit
- Tim Grimm
- Molly Johansen
- Neal Bradshaw
- Teresa Atkinson
- Autumn Rodriguez
- Emily Bermensolo
- Julie Baranco
- Melissa Maiden
- Nancy McKenzie

Approximately **15 government employees** have contributed tremendously to the success of our first year. The following regular government employees have committed a number of hours helping with set up or auditing and certifying work.

- Rose Secakuku
- Ian Glander
- Gini Broyles
- Lisa Kilpatrick
- Amy Kishpaugh

# A Big Hurricane Season

Interagency hurricane relief efforts were directed in response to Katrina (August 29), Rita (September 24) and Wilma (October 24) which collectively impacted coastal areas from east Texas to the Florida panhandle, plus south Florida from the Gulf to the Atlantic.



The 2005 hurricane season has been the most active on record. There were 27 named storms this year with seven of those being major hurricanes of Category 3 or higher. At the peak of the hurricane relief efforts, approximately 5,500 personnel were assigned to 30 different locations in seven states.

\*Taken from the National Incident Information Center Web Page.

## Hurricane Statistics

	Number of Payments	Amount Gross
BIA	1,421	\$3,322,171.01
BLM	299	\$986,270.41
FWS	63	\$108,120.16
Total	1,783	\$4,416,561.58



# CPC ISSUES

## Lost Checks

Handling lost checks requires a full time Lead position during fire season. Beginning in June, we began tracking all pending and resolved lost checks on a spreadsheet. Any calls coming in from a casual looking for his/her check is fielded to the Lost Check lead. We always tell the casual that a treasury check will take around 5-10 business days to receive from processed date and an EFT will take 3-5 business days.

The majority of lost checks have come from closed EFT (electronic funds transfer) accounts that were not changed to check mailing addresses. All information from the old EFF pay system was moved

over to the FPPS system on January 2, 2005.

Unfortunately, we cannot remove an EFT without a signed form from the casual stating where they want their check sent to.

After removing a bad EFT account or getting a new form to change a check mailing address, all reissued checks are processed through the National Business Center, Payroll Operations Division.

We have **reissued over 600 checks** since January.

Confirmed Reissues	623
Returned WES- (EFT)	260
Returned WES—(chk)	88
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>971</b>

The CPC sends out a Wage and Earnings Statement for every processed payment. Returned Wage and Earnings Statements resulting from an insufficient address often lead to lost checks. All returned mail must be followed up on to obtain a valid mail address for any future correspondence, including year end W-2s.

## Issue Lead

Trial and error during the first few months of handling issues led us to designating one Issue Lead to tracking and resolving all issues. If anything is found during our stages of processing a timesheet, the casual timesheet is pulled from the batch, the issue is logged in a spreadsheet, and the approving official on the memo will be called to resolve the issue.

Our goal is to make a contact within the first day the issue is found to get it resolved as soon as possible. No other timesheets in the batch would be held; the rest of the batch would be processed.

All issues are logged and tracked and the multitude that come in require a fulltime Lead position and a Basic to assist in phone calls and processing resolved issues.

We began logging and tracking all issues on a spreadsheet in June. The number of logged issues since June are:

AGENCY	Issues	Contacts made	% Issues per agency received payments
<b>BIA</b>	<b>3736</b>	<b>1627</b>	<b>18.3%</b>
<b>BLM</b>	<b>1793</b>	<b>1134</b>	<b>23.1%</b>
<b>FWS</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>18.6%</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5682</b>	<b>3012</b>	<b>19.6% of total payments received were issues</b>

### Frequent Issues Include:

- Incomplete position code
- Casual not marked (block 4)
- Block 26 of OF-288 not signed or not an original signature
- Incomplete cost coding
- Hired At unit identifier (eg ID-BOD) missing or incorrect
- Duplicate or overlapping hours on timesheet
- Start and stop time not in 15 min increments or time overlaps into following day, or not in military time.
- Address in the FPPS system is different than their address on the OF-288. \* We attempt to contact the casual to avoid a lost check.

# CPC ISSUES

## Social Security Numbers

When entering casual information in FPPS, an input Basic may find a different SSN in the system under the casual's name. If there have been payments under two SSNs for the same casual, an extensive process for merging the SSNs into the correct number must be undergone. The Social Security Administration (SSA) also periodically sends the CPC a list of invalid names or SSNs that a casual has been paid on.

Action taken includes:

- ⇒ CPC pulls all files associated with the casual, contacts the agency for a valid W-4 or I-9 if necessary to locate correct SSN, then documents all action taken.
- ⇒ The CPC contacts FPPS helpdesk reporting the problem and providing the correct SSN to be retained for the permanent record.
- ⇒ The FPPS helpdesk submits all necessary paperwork to FPPS systems support to merge all data under the correct SSN. This takes an estimated 2 weeks and is an extensive undertaking for FPPS Systems staff.

### Incorrect SSNs entered in the system could result from:

- ◆ Agency errors (submitting or transposing incorrect SSN on the OF-288) ≈ 20%
- ◆ Casual errors (writing an incorrect SSN on their W-4) ≈ 20%
- ◆ Operator Error (Data entry worker does not search for casual in the system and enters a new casual hire under a different SSN in the system or interprets the SSN incorrectly from an illegible W-4) ≈ 20%
- ◆ Unknown (could be carried over from 2004 or error origination is unknown) ≈ 40%

There were **96** completed SSN merges in 2005

\*It is extremely important for each casual hire to ensure the clarity and accuracy of the information provided. This validates the payroll information reported to the IRS and to SSA that provides life long salary records.

## Payroll Corrections

### PCOR

Payroll corrections (PCOR) and Payroll Adjustments (PADJ) are FFS processes used to correct **Cost Coding Errors** either for the current pay period (PCOR) or a prior pay period (PADJ).

### MOST COMMON CAUSES OF PCOR ERRORS:

- ◆ Cost codes on OF-288s received with incorrect or illegible information.
- ◆ Project codes entered with the incorrect characters (numeric instead of alpha or vice versa) or being used with the wrong subactivity or office.

AGENCY	Agency error	CPC Error	Total
BIA	149	119	268
BLM	54	45	99
TOTAL	203	164	367
% of corrections	55%	45%	1.3% error of total payments

\*FWS did not have a process for payroll corrections in 2005.

# CPC ISSUES

## How can we improve the process?

### **The AD PAY PLAN**

The Casual Payment Center strictly follows the DOI Pay Plan for Emergency Workers. The Pay Plan clearly outlines what a casual hire is, and their limitations. If the Pay Plan states that casuals must not work more than 300 hazardous fuel hours per calendar year, we will not pay it. If a position code is not in the pay plan, we will not pay it. We do not track hours until the FPPS system warns that the hours have been reached.

It will be helpful for the field to track all casual hours to ensure nothing is exceeded.

### **HIRING PROCESS**

The CPC does not require or keep I-9s, but it is essential to have the form filled out at the field level. The Social Security Administration alerts our office if a social security number is incorrect or does not match the name. This results in a lot of cleanup work if the SSN is not initially correct.

### **SUBMITTING BATCHES**

We require that an Approving Memo accompany all batches that are sent in. The memo should be complete with a valid approving official signature, your own batch number to track and a complete manifest of the timesheets that are sent in. We also need a phone number if we need to reach you to avoid delayed payment to any casual.

### **MULTIPLE OF-288S FOR THE SAME CASUAL SUBMITTED IN SEPARATE BATCHES**

The CPC has had a hard time processing OF-288s that come in for the same casual under different batch numbers on the same day or within 2 days. When we input time into FPPS, we cannot input a new timesheet for that casual until the first is processed. This results in having to find where the other timesheet is and either merge the two together or wait until the first is processed without delaying input on everyone else from the second batch. Both are time consuming and cumbersome. If we merge two timesheets from separate batches, we only have to certify once, and only one paycheck has to be processed. However, we have received several calls from casuals who expected 2 paychecks even though all hours have been paid in one paycheck.

The easiest solution for all of us would be if the field compiled all time worked by a casual (within a few days) and submitted together under one batch number.



# 2005 STATISTICS

## Budget

FY 2005 CPC CENTER FUNDING					
	BLM	BIA	FWS	NPS	Total
<b>Start Up</b>	\$150,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$150,000
<b>Non Wildland Urban Interface</b>	\$15,000	\$9,000	\$6,000	\$9,000	\$39,000
<b>Wildland Urban Interface</b>	\$30,000	\$13,000	\$6,000	\$10,000	\$59,000
<b>Preparedness</b>	\$45,700	\$92,000	\$3,000	\$0	\$140,700
<b>Suppression</b>	\$347,000	\$5,400	\$5,000		\$357,400
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$587,700</b>	<b>\$119,400</b>	<b>\$20,000</b>	<b>\$19,000</b>	<b>\$746,100</b>

\*Non WUI and WUI spent in Contracting

\*\*The Center Manager worked 2,139 hours from Jan 9, 2005- Sept 30, 2005.

## Correspondence

The Casual Payment Center established a toll free number to provide better customer service to casualls and the field.

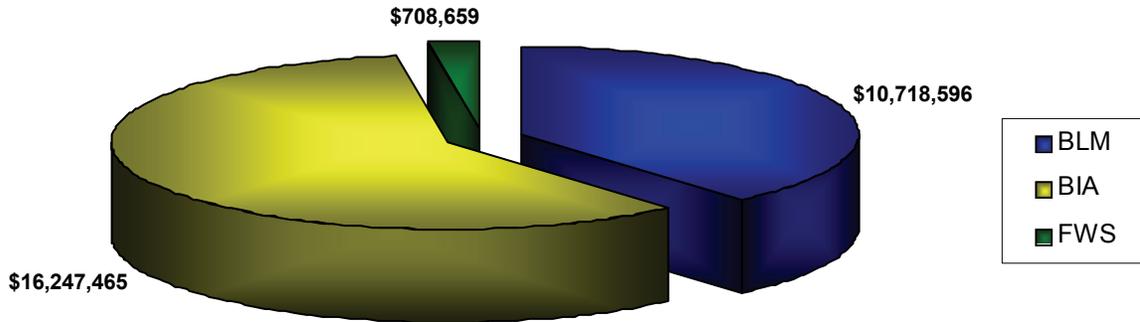
A casual may call the payment center to inquire about their pay or employment verifications at any time. Dealing with incoming inquiries as well as outgoing calls regarding any issues, the payment center has been busy.



\*In 2005, the CPC used **33,066 minutes** and logged **9,830 incoming and outgoing calls**.

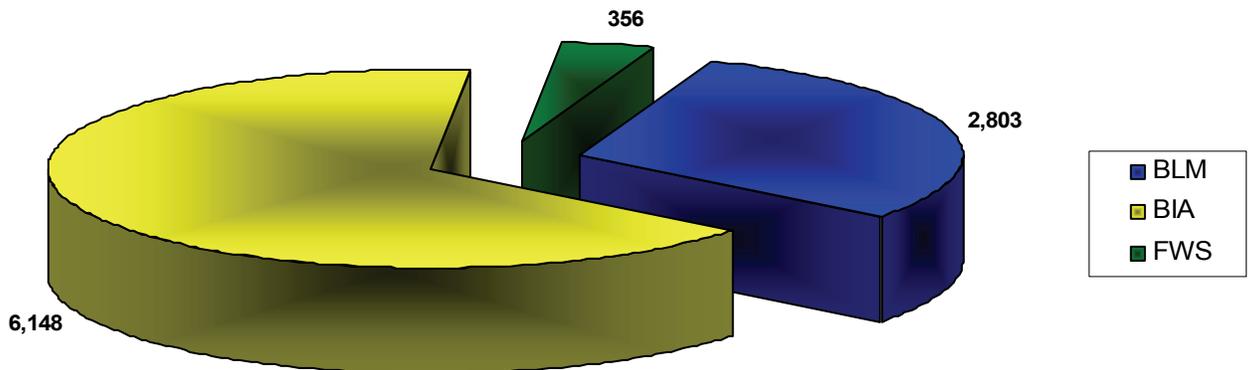
Month	Number of Incoming and Outgoing Calls
Jan	95
Feb	192
Mar	336
Apr	680
May	863
Jun	1,148
Jul	1,311
Aug	1,740
Sep	1,344
Oct	1,167
Nov	540
Dec	414
<b>Total Number of Incoming and Outgoing Calls</b>	<b>9,830 calls</b>

# 2005 STATISTICS



Office ID	Casual Count	Amt Gross	YTD Total %
BLM	2,803	\$10,718,596	38.7%
BIA	6,148	\$16,247,465	58.7%
FWS	356	\$708,659	2.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,307</b>	<b>\$27,674,720</b>	<b>100%</b>

Casuals Payrolled



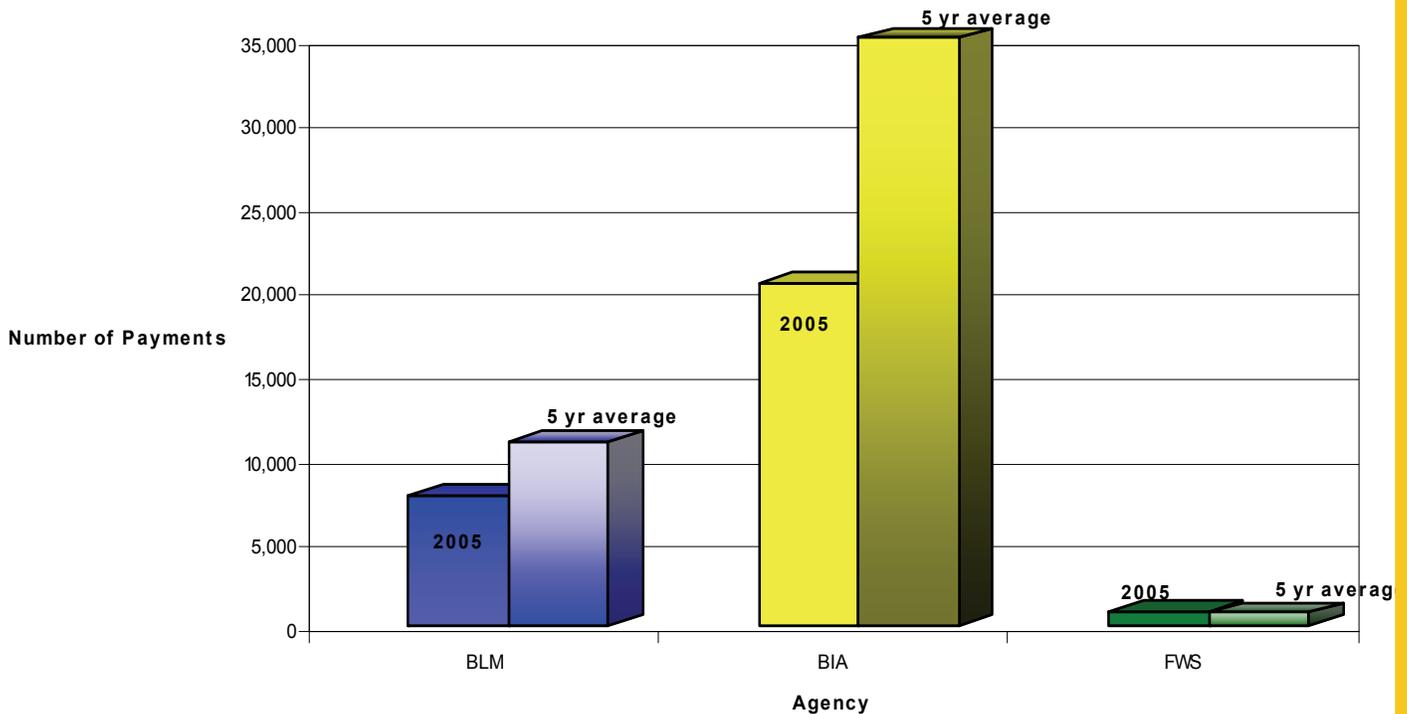
# 2005 STATISTICS

## Agency Payments 2005

	Number of Payments	Percent
BLM	7,754	26.8%
BIA	20,382	70.4%
FWS	822	2.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>28,958</b>	<b>100%</b>

## 5 Year Average (2001-2005)

	Number of Payments	Amt Gross	Total 5 yr Average %
BLM	10,914	\$13,856,725	31.0%
BIA	34,944	\$30,232,517	67.6%
FWS	696	\$613,546	1.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>46,554</b>	<b>\$44,702,788</b>	<b>100%</b>



\*In 2005, the Casual Payment Center processed 62% of the 5 year average for EFF payments.

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## Casual Payment Center

BIA, BLM & FWS

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Visit the National Business Center Website designed for hiring units and other entities regarding payroll processing, Federal and state income tax withholding and links to other related websites:

<http://www3.nbc.gov/customer/casualpay/index.html>

