



# U.S. Railroad Retirement Board Plain Writing Act of 2010 Annual Compliance Report May 2017

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## **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 2015, the RRB implemented its 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 includes a specific course on the tenets of the Plain Writing Act, along with several courses on the subject of effective written communication. While there was some consideration to targeting specific groups of employees for the online course on the Plain Writing Act, it was made mandatory for all employees in the summer of 2016. As a result, 786 RRB employees successfully completed the training. (About 35 employees did not complete the training, many of whom retired around the time the training was first required.) The agency hopes to see benefits from this training for many years to come, and plans to require refresher training on a periodic basis. We will also consider making this training mandatory for new

employees, particularly those that are in positions or career paths that involve extensive written communication with the public.

In terms of other training, 28 employees successfully completed an in-person training class on “Business Writing for Professionals.” In addition, five other agency employees completed other online courses related to business writing, editing and proofreading.

An ongoing activity at the RRB is the review of documents and online content to make them clearer, following guidelines and best practices related to plain language and writing. The agency has also implemented a system to automate the internal review process for certain budget-related documents, thereby increasing opportunities for collaboration while improving the clarity and comprehensibility of these documents.

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

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