



Plain Writing Compliance Report

Office of the Executive Secretary

2018-2019



Homeland
Security

**Department of Homeland Security
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The Plain Writing Act of 2010 was signed into law on October 13, 2010. The purpose of the Act is “to improve the effectiveness and accountability of federal agencies to the public by promoting clear Government communication that the public can understand and use.” This law changed how the Federal Government communicates and all government agencies are expected to adhere to the guidance as outlined in the Plain Writing Act of 2010.

Our Commitment

The Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) responsibility for national priorities such as emergency preparedness, cyber security, immigration, travel, and international trade underscore the importance of accurate, efficient, and effective information. Many aspects of the Department’s programs and operations have a direct effect on our stakeholders and the general public and it is vital that we communicate with them clearly and reliably.

Oversight

Designated Senior Official for Plain Writing:
Executive Secretary, Office of the Secretary

Departmental Plain Writing Coordinator:
Assistant Executive Secretary, Office of the Executive Secretary

Implementation Plan

The DHS Plain Writing Implementation Plan is available on the Department’s public-facing plain writing website. A small group of agency representatives prepared this plan and submitted it to Department leadership as a proposal for DHS-wide action. This plan details the responsibilities of the plain writing officials and points of contact, as well as our training plan and additional resources.

Compliance Report

The completion and publication of this report satisfies the compliance report requirement.

Mechanism for Public Feedback

The DHS plain writing webpage provides an email address that allows the public to communicate ideas or concerns with regard to DHS’s plain writing efforts (DHSPlainWriting@hq.dhs.gov). Communication submitted to this address is immediately reviewed and considered.

Website Access

DHS has encouraged its Components to use plain writing for all prepared materials. In support of this, DHS created a webpage devoted to plain writing (www.dhs.gov/plain-writing-dhs). This webpage includes a link to the DHS Plain Writing Implementation Plan, the DHS plain writing leadership, and the avenue in which the general public can provide their feedback on plain

writing at DHS. Internally, the Office of the Executive Secretary posts plain writing tips, training opportunities, and other plain writing tools on its internal webpage for DHS-wide use.

The Department's public webpage also links to a site devoted to "Open Government," outlining DHS's commitment to transparency and clear communication.

Training Tools

DHS employees are encouraged to take advantage of free online training (e.g., the Federal Aviation Administration's Basic Plain Writing course). Additionally, several groups within DHS offer plain writing training to DHS employees and can tailor the sessions to a particular audience, ranging from concise webinar overviews to longer personalized and more intensive sessions. While not every position within DHS is writing intensive, every employee is encouraged to have a basic understanding of plain language and its benefits. DHS Components generally organize their own training with guidance from DHS Headquarters, and often offer it to all DHS employees.

We also utilize the resources available through the Plain Language Action and Information Network's (PLAIN) website (plainlanguage.gov). Several DHS representatives attended PLAIN's "Train the Trainer Bootcamp" and are available to train small groups upon request.

Additionally, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' plain writing program is lauded throughout the Federal Government and provides exceptional classroom training to DHS and other executive agencies, which can be customized for each audience.

In addition to training, DHS promotes plain writing through the use of colorful posters throughout the offices and verbal reminders in regular meetings with representatives from all DHS Components. The Office of the Executive Secretary has also dedicated a section to plain writing in its Executive Correspondence Handbook.

Our Accomplishments

In 2018, DHS commemorated its 15th anniversary. Created in the wake of the tragic events of September 11, 2001, DHS combined 22 federal agencies with the shared goal of keeping our nation safe. For the last 15 years, DHS has managed to ensure national security while balancing the trials of a young Department with a multifaceted mission.

DHS continues to mature and adapt to the ever-changing national security landscape. Our ability to effectively communicate with our numerous stakeholders, foreign governments, and the public is critical to our success, and it is something DHS takes very seriously. Given our Department's unique charge, unclear or inconsistent messaging could not only result in confusion, in extreme circumstances, it could put lives at risk.

DHS leadership is committed to the use of plain writing in all written communications and the Office of the Executive Secretary works to ensure that the momentum gained through the plain writing initiative is maintained by:

- Communicating the importance of this initiative to incoming leadership;
- Updating the internal DHS website to include the most up to date plain writing information;

- Updating the Department’s public plain writing webpage;
- Monitoring the Department’s public plain writing email address (DHSPlainWriting@hq.dhs.gov) and preparing timely responses when appropriate; and
- Emphasizing the importance and benefits of plain writing both internally and externally.

In addition to the efforts above, and in line with the plain writing initiative’s guiding principles, several DHS Components have reviewed and proposed updates to their mission statements to more accurately reflect their organization’s role in national security.

Moving Forward

As the lead for the Department’s plain writing efforts, the Office of the Executive Secretary will continue to further its efforts to promote plain writing within the Department through:

- **Communication.**
Updates to our internal plain writing webpage will offer additional plain writing resources to all DHS employees.
- **Employee education.**
As new employees join DHS, we educate them on the importance of the plain writing initiative and ensure they are aware of training opportunities. Additionally, we have encouraged all DHS Components to ensure that they are using plain writing in the preparation of their on-boarding materials.
- **Collaboration.**
In addition to furthering efforts within DHS, we will continue to build partnerships with plain writing organizations such as PLAIN and the Center for Plain Language.