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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
REGIONAL OFFICE
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GOVERNMENT CENTER
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02203

October 24, 1974

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Mr. Robert Mitchell
Regional Administrator, Region I
Federal Energy Administration
150 Causeway Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02114

Dear Mr. Mitchell:

Since our last letter to you, we have reviewed the activities of the Operations Division which consists of the Case Resolution Branch and the Energy Assistance Center. These two sections process requests for additional petroleum products and we assessed their productivity now that the petroleum supply is less critical than during the first quarter of 1974. Since changed circumstance requests (as defined by Section 211.13(c) of the Mandatory Petroleum Allocation Regulations) were no longer being processed, we also wanted to determine the effect this had on their workload. Our findings and conclusions are summarized below.

CASE RESOLUTION

The Case Resolution Branch has a staff of 14 Case Resolution Officers to process applications for additional petroleum products. Recently there has been a substantial decrease in the applications being processed. During the period March 7, 1974 to June 19, 1974, Case Resolution processed a weekly average of 262 applications. From June 20, 1974 to August 29, 1974, the average applications processed declined to 92 per week, a 65 percent decrease. This decline has occurred while the average number of Case Resolution Officers has remained stable. A weekly listing of cases closed is shown in Attachment I.

The Director of the Operations Division cited two reasons for the decline. First, except for extreme hardships, changed circumstance cases are no longer being processed and recently about 800 of them were returned to the applicants. He added that some cases may be resubmitted but it is too soon to tell what the applicants will do.

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Secondly, the cases resolved during July and August were more complex and generally required as much as a week to resolve. Based on a sample of closed cases, however, we determined that this was not so. For the week August 8-14, 1974, the Case Resolution Branch closed 86 new cases. We selected 16 of these cases (19 percent) for review. We could not determine the time it took to resolve two cases. Eleven took two days or less to resolve. The remaining three required more than two days and were delayed only because the Case Resolution Officer required additional documentation. Thus, current cases do not appear to be taking very long to resolve.

The Director of the Operations Division did not disagree with our findings but indicated that it might not be a representative week. He had no suggestions as to what would be a representative week.

In our opinion, the level of manpower required by the Case Resolution Branch should be reevaluated in view of the reduced caseload. Personnel not needed could be placed in other staff positions where they can be more effectively utilized.

ENERGY ASSISTANCE CENTER

The Energy Assistance Center (EAC) handles information requests including inquiries, complaints and pricing questions. It also reviews applications for additional petroleum products (FEA Form 17's) to determine whether the requests are valid. There has been a substantial decrease in applications reviewed by the EAC staff. During the period May 9, 1974 to July 17, 1974, the EAC staff reviewed a weekly average of 230 applications. From July 18, 1974 to August 29, 1974, the weekly average of applications processed dropped to 134, a 42 percent decrease. Also, the average number of EAC professional staff increased from 5.2 to 5.7, respectively, for the above periods. A weekly listing of applications reviewed is shown in Attachment II.

The EAC Chief acknowledged that there has been a decline in applications reviewed. He added that most of his staff's time is spent handling information requests and not reviewing applications. He did not know how much time was spent reviewing applications and could not give an estimate because it varied with the applications received. Although the Weekly Regional Status Report includes the total applications reviewed and information requests handled, the man-days expended are not reported and productivity can not be assessed.

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We believe that the Weekly Regional Status Report should be modified to show the output of the EAC in relation to man-days expended. This will provide management with a more meaningful information system.

OVERTIME PAID TO CASE RESOLUTION STAFF

Overtime paid to the Case Resolution staff for June, July and August 1974 was about $5,000. A monthly listing is shown in Attachment III. The only reason cited for overtime was the reduction of the case backlog, but the backlog actually increased during this period. We also noted that the weekly average cases closed did not increase as might be expected from the overtime expended.

About one-third of the overtime, $1,600, was paid to the former Chief of the Case Resolution Branch. During the two prior months of April and May 1974, he was also paid $1,600 in overtime, and the reason cited was to reduce the case backlog. We believe that authorizing overtime for this individual to reduce the case backlog seems questionable for two reasons. First, his function as Chief of the Case Resolution Branch is reviewing decisions of subordinates and not directly resolving cases. Secondly, as explained above, he worked the overtime when the backlog actually increased. Moreover, the average number of cases closed decreased during June, July and August.

Furthermore, we also found that overtime is not being approved in advance. The FEA Policy Guide for Overtime, dated July 15, 1974, requires that all overtime be approved in advance. We believe management should be aware of the need and reason for paying overtime before the fact. We discussed this with the Director of the Management Division and he stated that a memorandum outlining overtime policy will be prepared and distributed to all personnel.

OTHER QUESTIONABLE PERSONNEL ACTIONS

1. In reviewing the personnel records of the former Chief of the Case Resolution Branch, we noted another irregularity. On April 14, 1974, his pay status was changed from GS-13, step 1 to GS-13, step 4. The Notification of Personnel Action (SF 50) which initiated this change did not appear to justify this action. We contacted FEA

headquarters which maintains the official personnel file and discussed this matter with responsible officials. We were informed that the employee was not entitled to the increase to step 4 and corrective action would be taken.

2. In reviewing the same individual's personnel records, we also noted that FEA's records showed that he was terminated August 31, 1974, to accept a position with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). He returned to work at FEA ten days later and was paid by FEA for the time he worked at EPA. His personnel records, however, contained no documentation of these actions. FEA officials stated that this individual was not terminated but was actually detailed to EPA. They further stated that it was more feasible to detail him rather than terminate and rehire him since the required paperwork had not been processed by FEA/Washington when he returned to FEA.

We discussed this matter with both FEA and EPA officials who confirmed that this was not documented. EPA, apparently as a result of our discussing the matter with FEA officials, subsequently documented the employee's detailee status.

We believe that the failure to provide documentation for these personnel actions indicates a need to improve FEA's administrative practices.

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We would appreciate your response to the matters discussed in this letter within 30 days. We will be glad to discuss them with you if you desire.

A copy of the letter is being sent to the Assistant Administrator of the Office of Management and Administration.

Thank you for the cooperation and the assistance of your staff during our review.

Sincerely yours,

Joseph Eder

Joseph Eder
Regional Manager

CASES CLOSED BY CASE RESOLUTION
MARCH 1974-AUGUST 1974

Week Ending	Cases Closed	Number of Case Resolution Officers	Average Number of Cases Closed
March 13, 1974	161	13	12.4
March 20, 1974	448	14	32.0
March 27, 1974	245	12	20.4
April 3, 1974	336	19	17.6
April 10, 1974	311	16	19.4
April 17, 1974	230	17	13.5
April 24, 1974	239	20	12.0
May 1, 1974	348	16	21.7
May 8, 1974	508	16	31.8
May 15, 1974	164	16	10.3
May 22, 1974	308	15	20.5
May 29, 1974	191	15	12.7
June 5, 1974	63	14	4.5
June 12, 1974	236	14	16.9
June 19, 1974	149	14	10.6
June 26, 1974	114	15	7.6
July 3, 1974	89	14	6.4
July 10, 1974	59	15	3.9
July 17, 1974	157	15	10.5
July 24, 1974	106	15	7.1
July 31, 1974	92	15	6.1
August 7, 1974	35	14	2.5
August 15, 1974	87	14	6.2
August 22, 1974	138	14	9.9
August 29, 1974	47	14	3.4

CASE APPLICATIONS REVIEWED
BY
ENERGY ASSISTANCE CENTER
MAY 1974-AUGUST 1974

Week Ending	Case Applications Reviewed	Number of Professionals Reviewing Applications	Average Number of Applications Reviewed
May 15, 1974	268	3	89.3
May 22, 1974	226	4	56.5
May 29, 1974	135	6	22.5
June 5, 1974	198	5	39.6
June 12, 1974	191	4	47.8
June 19, 1974	81	4	20.3
June 26, 1974	226	5	45.2
July 3, 1974	243	7	34.7
July 10, 1974	353	8	44.1
July 17, 1974	383	6	63.8
July 24, 1974	193	7	27.6
July 31, 1974	115	6	19.2
August 7, 1974	169	6	28.2
August 15, 1974	108	4	27.0
August 22, 1974	124	6	20.7
August 29, 1974	97	5	19.4

ATTACHMENT III

OVERTIME OF THE CASE RESOLUTION BRANCH
JUNE 1974 - AUGUST 1974

Name	June		July		August		Total Overtime	
	Hours	Dollars	Hours	Dollars	Hours	Dollars	Hours	Dollars
Harrison Beckman	10.5	$ 92.19	1	$ 8.78		$	11.5	$ 100.97
Robert Allen	49.5	434.61	11.5	100.97	7	61.46	68	597.04
Robert Werlin			20	175.60			20	175.60
Edward Finigan	83.25	803.36	84.5	815.43			167.75	1,618.79
Donal Smith	15	144.75	8	77.20			23	221.95
John McCarthy			19	183.35			19	183.35
Joseph McCarthy	18	163.08	5	48.25	11.5	110.98	34.5	322.31
Michele Greco	48.5	425.83	30.5	267.79	12	105.36	91	798.98
Randall Welch	1	7.19			1	7.19	2	14.38
Carol Forsythe					17.5	153.65	17.5	153.65
Mathew Wills					7	67.55	7	67.55
Heine Forsstrom	55.5	399.05	29	208.51			84.5	607.56
Maureen Schwede	4	20.76					4	20.76
Totals	285.25	$2,490.82	208.5	$1,885.88	56.0	$506.19	549.75	$4,882.89