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DOD employees flood agency with e-mail on pay-for-performance plans

By Judi Hasson
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Defense Department employees are not sitting quietly as DOD pushes forward with plans to change the way it pays and promotes more than 600,000 civilian employees.

Employees sent so many responses during a comment period on the National Security Personnel System (NSPS), which is developing a new salary program for civilian employees, that Pentagon officials turned to ICF Consulting's CommentWorks software to help them sort, organize and publish the comments online.

By March 16, the end of the comment period, DOD officials had catalogued more than 58,000 letters, possibly the most responses ever to changes proposed by the department. And most of the respondents opposed the plan.

"We expected a large number of comments on the proposed NSPS regulations and wanted to leverage technology to assist us in capturing, organizing and analyzing those comments," said Brad Bunn, NSPS' deputy program executive officer.

Officials scanned e-mail and written notes and published them on NSPS' Web site. In comparison, the Homeland Security Department, which is also developing a pay-for-performance system, received only 3,800 comments, Bunn said.

Mary Lacey, NSPS' program executive officer, said the new program would be the most important change in the federal personnel system in half a century. "It will provide DOD with a modern, flexible and agile human resources system that can be more responsive to the national security environment, while enhancing employee involvement, protections and benefits," she said.

But most employees who sent comments to DOD don't like the proposal. "I think this is the worst thing to happen to people who help support our troops at war or peace time," one comment states.

"What the DOD really needs is performance leadership, not a new performance management system," another e-mail says.

"I believe the proposed NSPS will undermine the civil service and hurt the mission of DOD," one handwritten note states.

Most respondents indicated that they do not want DOD to replace the civil service pay system with one that rewards performance and eliminates annual raises, said Mark Gibson, a labor relations specialist with the American Federation of Government Employees, which represents more than 220,000 federal employees.

CommentWorks is used throughout the government, especially at agencies that require a public comment period for changing rules and regulations.

"DOD is making robust use of the tool," said Gary Light, ICF's vice president.
"It is the first time that DOD is using the product."