



Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation
Office of Inspector General
1200 K Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005-4026

February 1, 2005

MEMORANDUM

TO: Bradley Belt
Executive Director

FROM: Robert L. Emmons
Inspector General

SUBJECT: PBGC Email Retention Policy

During my monthly update meeting with you in December, I agreed to benchmark PBGC's email retention policies with other federal agencies to identify best practices. As we discussed, excessive email retention increases cost and impacts on the operability of our networks.

In response to your request, I asked Luther Atkins to benchmark with other Federal Agencies. Seven of the eight federal agencies we contacted provided us with their policy. As you might expect, retention policies vary widely, but there are generally two approaches to managing email. The first is a voluntary approach, where it is left to the individual employee to monitor and control the volume of emails that are retained. The second approach is to take a more proactive role by limiting the amount of email storage space that each employees is allowed.

Based on our benchmarking, the proactive approach is used by six of the seven agencies that responded (the exception was the Federal Reserve Board, who uses a voluntary approach). The proactive approach improves an agency's ability to manage resources, reduce cost and minimize the risk of retaining excessive amounts of email. For example, three agencies automatically delete or archive emails in a user's mailbox after a specified period of time (e.g. 30, 45, or 90 days).

We also noted that Department of Homeland Security follows Microsoft's best practices for Exchange Database management:

Without a conscientious approach to capacity management, the size of your information store databases will quickly get out of control. We suggest that you set a maximum information store size and then manage the information store within those limits.

PBGC's email policy has always been to use a voluntary approach, with employees having the primary responsibility for managing the volume of email retained on our computers. OIG has discussed email retention with Office of Information Technology in the past, and they share our concern with the volume of email retained by employees. When I discussed our most recent work with Rick Hartt, he said that several initiatives have been implemented to reduce the amount of email. The most recent initiative included an information campaign to emphasize the importance of archiving emails.

Rick also provided me with the draft policy that covers the use of email that he is discussing with the union. We believe the policy is a step in the right direction, but there are two aspects of the policy that based on our benchmarking, are much more liberal than other Agencies. First, the policy provides for a 400 megabyte limit on each employees mailbox. The norm in other agencies was generally 100 megabytes. Second, the policy does not specify the actions that will be taken when the policy is not followed.

Most agencies have a policy that requires automatic archiving of emails after a specified period of time (e.g. 30, 45, or 90 days), or when the mailbox exceeds size limits. At two agencies, the policy was draconian when compared to our policy. At Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, users can't send outgoing emails when mailboxes exceed 100 megabytes. At Federal Trade Commission, email older than 45 days is automatically deleted and cannot be recovered.

While we don't advocate a draconian policy, we do think proactive controls would improve PBGC's ability to manage email effectively. In our recent investigations that were referred to us by the Office of Information Technology, we noted that a large number of employees stored excessive amounts of emails, and many employees stored a large volume of non-business files on computers. Based on our findings and our benchmarking, we suggest that you consider strengthening the draft email retention policy by reducing the authorized size of mailboxes and requiring automatic archiving when employees exceed mailbox size limits.

I have discussed this memorandum with Rick Hartt. A summary of the benchmarking information we gathered is attached. If you have any questions or need additional information, let me know.

cc: Rick Hartt

Results of Benchmarking on Email Retention

The following are summarizations of how email is administered, controlled, or used in a sample of federal agencies.

Federal Trade Commission

- The FTC's policy regarding e-mail is available on the intranet and details the types of e-mail records that must be saved and the proper procedure for saving these e-mails.
- The agency's e-mail system will not provide users with auto-archive functionality.
- All e-mails older than 45 days in agency mailbox folders will be deleted automatically and they will not be recoverable.
- E-mail archives are not an appropriate records storage system and should be used to store only items that are of temporary value regarding matters or issues that are currently pending.
- All employees must review the e-mails that they have archived and delete everything that the agency is not required to retain or that is no longer applicable to open matters.

Department of Energy

- E-mail is not purged until an individual's mailbox is full. Once full, a network warning appears telling the user to clean out old e-mails. The message re-appears until the situation is addressed.
- Auto-archiving can be set at the individual's discretion (e.g., every 90 days). All archived messages are moved off the mail system and placed in stand alone folders/files.

Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation

- Mailbox size is limited to 100MB. Once that limit is met, e-mails cannot be sent (but can be received) until the size of the mailbox is reduced.
- On a weekly basis, messages in the mailbox "Sent Items" folder that are older than 21 days are moved to a "Cleanup" folder in the mailbox. An e-mail is sent notifying the user of what action was taken.
- Messages in the "Cleanup" folder are retained for approximately 40 days longer before they are actually deleted.

Department of Labor – Bureau of Labor Statistics

- Once a mailbox reaches 80MB, a warning e-mail message is sent to the user and e-mail can still be received, but not sent.
- Once a mailbox reaches 100MB, the user cannot send or receive any e-mail.
- Deleted e-mail is retained in the e-mail server for 30 days before being removed.
- Auto-archive is set and maintained at the user's discretion.
- Cannot automatically forward any e-mail using out-of-office assistant or inbox assistant.

We also requested information from other agencies. These either sent policy statements on the use of e-mail not including any information on the configuration or administration of e-mail, or did not respond at all. The other agencies from who we requested information and their response were as follows:

Social Security Administration

Attached are the e-mail policy and other information provided by SSA. One interesting item is that they limit the size of e-mail attachments sent through the SSA e-mail system to 5MB. They also include their policy on deleting any file extension of “.vbs” or “.exe”.

Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve Board

They also provided their high-level e-mail policy statement that is available on their intranet. It is very similar to the policy statement at PBGC.

Department of Homeland Security

This agency responded that they follow the Best Practices for Exchange Database Management from Microsoft. The following is one interesting item was highlighted in the document:

Capacity Management

An important issue when planning your Exchange system is determining how much disk space you'll need for the information store. Without a conscientious approach to capacity management, the size of your information store databases will quickly get out of control. We suggest that you set a maximum information store size and then manage the information store within those limits. You can get a good idea of how big your databases will grow by setting mailbox quotas and tracking the growth of the information store over time. You should have enough free space to support the messaging needs of the users on the server, but mailbox storage limits should be set such that users don't consume excessive amounts of disk resources.

Department of Education

Response not received in time to be included in this document.