



Hoosier Happenings

OCTOBER 2014

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

***VISION 2025 AND WHAT YOU CAN DO TO SAVE YOUR JOBS**

***FORCING CITIZENS TO USE THE INTERNET**

***DON'T FORGET TO VOTE!**

How safe are you at work ? By Lisa Williams

October is Domestic Violence Awareness month and according to the Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA), homicide is the second leading cause of death in the US workplace. Every time, you turn on the news you hear about violence in the world. Are we safe when we come to work every day? Does the Agency do enough?

The thought of homicide being the second leading cause of death in the US workplace is a scary statistic. This got me to thinking, "Am I safe?" We often deal with people who are mentally unstable or ill, or just in financial crisis. This causes people to sometimes threaten or turn to violence. I still remember how my heart raced when a gun fell out of a claimant's pocket, who ended up being a retired police officer. But what if he hadn't been? What danger could be lurking around the corner? At least once a week, you hear about an AIRS report being written because a claimant caused an incident. This only leads to more questions: What is an AIRS report? What is VIPR High Risk procedure? Do all offices have guards and barrier walls? What about metal detectors? Many of us, whom are not in a protected federal building, do not have all of these safety features. Instead, some of us only have a guard and if we are lucky a barrier wall, too. Let's take a quick look at these safety features, then you can be the judge!

The Automated Incident Reporting System (AIRS) report is an online reporting system which collects data and information on incidents occurring in SSA offices, which is then

used to determine vulnerabilities and if additional protective measures are needed. AIRS utilizes two different kinds of incident reports: dangerous or criminal activity that occurs directly on SSA property or a threat against an employee or building received by mail, phone or fax. These are different from an Advisory Report, which is created if an accident, illness or injury occurs on SSA property or if an incident occurs nearby the SSA office but does not pose a threat. When these types of incidents occur the report will include various types of information, including: the person's name, property damage, vehicle information, incident summary, any background information, what action was taken, and if any emergency personal (police, ambulance, fire) responded. The AIRS reports are completed by management, and are then distributed to the office where the incident occurred, the Health and Safety Representative in the office, the Regional Office, and Headquarters. The safety information is then housed in a program called SAFE, in which only management has been granted access.

The field offices do have another safety feature in VIPR called High Risk Alert, which more information can be found in SM 31020.150. It basically states that VIPR will notify the interviewer, managers and employees with administrative rights when a person who been deemed high risk comes into a local office or calls

in. To be deemed high risk, a person has to have taken action or threatened action that effects the security and safety of SSA employees, guards, visitors, facilities or records. As a result, some individuals are banned from conducting business with SSA in-person. Each office's management team decides how to handle these alerts when they come up and if they will allow the person to conduct in-person business.

Finally, we have physical safety features in our barrier walls and guards. Every open SSA office must have a guard in attendance to help bring some level of protection. Our guards are there to protect not only our staff, but our visitors as well. The guard station should be in a location that has a good view of what is going on in the office. It is important to remember that they are not a receptionist and need to be concentrating on the public visiting our office. Our guards are familiar with our duress alarms and also have access to video cameras. While our guards offer us protection, at the time of this article, not all offices have been furnished with barrier walls. The Atlanta Region does have an enhancement guide for their reception areas that states all of their barrier walls should be 3/4-inch thick acrylic and counters on the public side should be between 12 and 18-inch in depth. These walls help SSA take a precautionary measure and to help minimize dangers.

Many of the primary ways SSA protects us from threats seem proactive, but should the agency be trying to combat violence before it occurs? Is enough being done to safeguard us on

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Vision 2025

We have been hearing a lot about this new vision of the Social Security Administration. But what does it really mean for the employees and the public? Since 2010, eighty field offices have been closed and those that remain open see their hours cut to the public. SSA intends to direct its ever growing volume of customer service traffic to its website. SSA has outsourced part of its database to Experian Credit Corporation of Ireland to safeguard the public's information. Already 200 million SSA accounts were compromised and Experian is currently under investigation by the FBI and Secret Service. Registering on the myssa.gov website can be difficult and the questions tricky for many users. SSA has installed self-help computers in many offices but the

process of filling online or registering a my SSA account. is difficult and tedious and an employee has to be available to assist the customers in most instances which defeats the purpose of the self-help PC. AFGE is asking Congress to cease the closing of field offices until SSA makes its plans about future closings known to Congress and the union. SSA has quietly and slowly been closing field offices without the approval or knowledge of Congress.

The Vision 2025 plan calls for the shrinking of public service delivery. Vision 2025 would replace public service with a combination of automation and contracting out many services.

The proposal by the National Academy of Public Administration would eliminate most, if not all, of our jobs. NOW IS THE TIME TO SPEAK UP to protect your jobs and the future of field offices and teleservice centers as we know them! Call your Congressman and demand the current field office structure remain intact, that the public be allowed to choose how they receive services and preserve face-to-face and telephone services. The public should have a choice in how they receive services from SSA. Speak up now... your job depends on it! Do not let Vision 2025 lead SSA into darkness!

“Labor cannot stand still. It must not retreat. It must go on, or go under.”
Harry Bridges

DON'T FORGET TO VOTE!

As Union members, one of our greatest responsibilities is to vote for our elected representatives. We have one of those times upon us now. You will be receiving in your home mail a ballot for the election of the 2nd Vice President on your AFGE Local 3571 Executive Board. Please remember to cast your vote in time to have it received at 9AM on 10/15/14 in Indianapolis for the counting of the ballots. The election committee is Erin Wylie, Renear Montgomery, and Jennifer Kirkham, if you have questions about this election. Go VOTE!

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a day-to-day basis? A guard and a duress button can only do so much if your claimant has a weapon pointed at you. Unfortunately, with all the active shooters we hear about in the news, it is a real threat.

I conducted extensive research for this article, and could not find a single statistic on how much violence actually occurs

in the field offices, but it does appear as though management has access to this data. Yet, I, as an employee, don't have the right or permission to know how dangerous it becoming to work at SSA. Instead, I have to perform a Google search to get information about general incidents of violence happening in our offices. While we don't

need specifics on any particular incident, if the agency is concerned about our safety we should be able to get the facts. Why is it such a secret? How safe are you every day when you report to work? What else can the agency do to protect our safety?

What can you do to fight Vision 2025?

Here is a Legislative Action guide to help those of you who choose to make visits, call, or email your District Congress person and Senators. They are currently on recess and should be in their respective hometowns. Right now is a good time to try and get in to see them, or, get a head-start on scheduling an appointment with them for the near future. Some of you will recall me having sent this guide out before. It's very easy and user friendly in getting started. Touching base with your lawmakers on a consistent basis is one of the best ways to inspire change to public policies, including our work here at SSA.

Legislative Action Guide

Contacting your Congressional Representatives and Senators is not difficult at all. Below I have provided a list of each District and the SSA offices in those respective Districts. All you need to do is go to the site by accessing the link below. Once there, all you need to do is find the District link of your office or where you live, click the link, and provided will be a wealth of information about your District Representative, including their official website where you can contact and schedule meetings with them in DC or right here at home. The attached word document is also available as a helpful example you may use or refer to when contacting your Senator or Representative. On a regular basis, each office from every District should assemble teams to make Congressional visits, send letters, write op-eds, call radio stations..., often. Again, not doing anything, essentially says to our lawmakers that we're okay with the closing of offices, eliminating our jobs, the cutting of our benefits and retirement.

<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/members/IN>

District 1 Offices: Gary, Hammond, Valparaiso, Michigan City

District 2 Offices: South Bend, Elkhart,

District 3 Offices: Ft Wayne, Auburn

District 4 Offices: Kokomo, Lafayette, Crawfordsville

District 5 Offices: Anderson, Marion

District 6 Offices: Muncie, Richmond, Columbus, Madison

District 7 Offices: Indianapolis Offices

District 8 Offices: Terre Haute, Vincennes, Evansville,

District 9 Offices: Bloomington, New Albany

Here is a model example/template of what to say in an email to lawmakers when trying to schedule meetings with them:

We are American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) from Social Security (SSA).

We understand the Senator/Congresswoman/man is inundated with multiple issues, so we always ensure to keep our meetings succinct, informative, to the point, and as short as possible.

We have learned over the years that there is a troublesome gap in communication between law makers, SSA management, government employees, and the American people. This gap in communication has contributed to gargantuan amounts of wasteful taxpayer dollars, failed labor contractual protocol, and lack of efficient and qualitative SSA service to the American people. Working together towards improvements would lead to less formal Congressional complaints submitted to your office and more citizen satisfaction.

We have facts, figures, and statistics; moreover, we have wide-ranging field office level experience that allows us to come to the table with sound solutions and suggestions that will benefit the American people - your constituents. Please offer some dates and times so we can meet with you, preferably in your city/town.

Forcing Citizens to Use the Internet?

Although this won't be a shock to many of you, it nevertheless angered me very much, and is relevant in light of this grand SSA Vision. One of my morning, in-office retirement appointments shared with me his experience in trying to schedule his appointment with a teleservice-center (TSC). He said that he wanted to schedule a face-to-face appointment, but trying to do so was a challenge, as the lady kept insisting that he file online, then badgered him as to why he didn't try to file online in the first place. So, the gentleman and his wife ultimately gave in and did not schedule the appointment and instead tried filing for his retirement benefits online. He shared with me that it was a difficult process, in part because the system required him to answer questions that he could not answer correctly. Moreover, he didn't feel safe in inputting certain information on the web anyway. Ultimately though, the gentleman called SSA again to try and schedule a face-to-face appointment. Not sure if he got to speak with the same person as before, but the SSA personnel at the TSC once again insisted that he file online, and again, badgered him as to why he didn't try to file online in the first place. He explained that he tried, but he does not want to file online. Finally, the SSA personnel scheduled his appointment, and I filed and processed his application today. He told me that the SSA personnel during both occasions seemed as if they took it very personally that he didn't want to file online. I was embarrassed. I told him that I'm very sorry he had to go through that. He filed-out a comment card and said that he'll be contacting his Congressman. Like many of you, I'm fully aware that claimants say a lot of things and we often have to balance and figure out their facts from fiction, however. What this gentleman shared with me was not a far stretch at all. Also, what is going on in offices between managers and employees where the employees feel so compelled to badger people towards the internet? Are employees doing this on their own, or are they being told to push internet services? Yes, I know that much of this is nothing new, but it has to be pointed out again and again until something is done about this and other problems regarding SSA's Vision..., which is, to put it mildly, "vision impaired." I do not want my parents, aunts and uncles, other relatives, and friends, or "anybody" for that matter, to endure this unacceptable, unprofessional behavior. Once again, the internet is most certainly a viable service delivery option that is amongst others we provide. Forcing members of the public to the internet is not okay. Regardless of how high-tech our society is becoming, a significant percentage of the public, high-tech or otherwise, nevertheless opt for other "non-internet" SSA services. Their citizenship and Social Security taxes have earned them the right to the service they want..., NOT what SSA is forcing them towards.

Onward we go in this struggle!!!

Amad Ali

"The labor movement was the principal force that transformed misery and despair into hope and progress"

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr

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Alexander Jacque, a Service Representative in the Terre Haute field office, was recently recognized by the agency on the Area 9 Hoosiers Helping Hoosiers website. An SR from a neighboring field office requested assistance from his office on a pending payee accounting case. Alex also is a member of the newsletter committee and assists in this publication. We appreciate his hard work to the union and to the public. As a result of Mr. Jacque's efforts, the SR sent an email to Alexander stating:
"You're the best!! Great teamwork and thank you soooo much!!!! You deserve a break today so head on over to McDonalds for a treat."

