

## Communications

It is very important that ODOT personnel, including the Region Manager, Region Maintenance Operations Manager, District Manager, Transportation Maintenance Manager, and their representatives, maintain good, effective communication with all involved parties. Good, effective communication:

- Helps the parties to develop and maintain good working relationships.
- Assures that each party knows what is expected of it, including the time for needed responses or actions.
- Assures that key persons are involved.
- Assures that copies of written communication are also sent to appropriate or interested parties.

When communicating with persons, particularly those who are not ODOT employees, the ODOT representative should always remain courteous, even if the communication or issue is contentious. When appropriate or if the issue is beyond the authority or responsibility of the immediate person, refer the issue to the person of proper authority or responsibility. Also refer to the discussion later in this section of this Guide.

Communication may be either written or verbal, but it is important that the involved parties use the most effective and efficient method of communication. The involved parties also must assure that the key persons are involved in, or at least aware of, the communication. Also refer to the discussion later in this section of this Guide.

For specific projects, tasks, or areas of interest, the Region or District Manager may involve the Transportation Maintenance Manager and others to develop a communication chart that identifies the key persons to be involved in communications on those subjects. That chart may also identify topics or subjects for which the District Manager, Region Manager, Region Public Affairs representative, or other identified person is the key communication contact.

Members of a crew or group of employees assigned to a task or operation must develop and maintain good communication to assure that the crew or group achieves the assigned objective, as well as all involved tasks.

### Administrative Directives

ODOT *Policy ORG 01-01* and Highway Division *Directive ORG 01-01* identify the system of internal directives, policies, procedures, and general instructions. Copies of ODOT Policies and Procedures are available on the Support Services Branch website of the ODOT Intranet. Copies of the Highway Division Directive are available on the Highway Division web site of the ODOT Intranet.

### Record Retention, Disposition, and Production upon Request

ODOT records should be filed and retained according to the *Standard Filing System Manual* and records retention schedules published by ODOT's Records Management

Section of the Support Services Branch. Follow that instruction to retain, dispose of, or archive ODOT records.

Many ODOT records or documents are classed as public records, under Oregon's Public Records Law, and may be reviewed by any interested person. ODOT *Procedure ADM 7-04* specifies the procedure for providing access to or copies of public records and the charges for doing that.

Certain ODOT records are exempt from disclosure and should not be made available to persons other than ODOT employees. Records, that may be exempt from disclosure, include:

- Records pertaining to litigation when a complaint or lawsuit has been filed or is likely to be filed.
- Personnel records.
- Communications, of an advisory nature within or between public bodies, with other than purely factual material that is preliminary to final agency action.

If you have a question about whether a specific document is exempt from public disclosure, contact the Assistant Attorney General assigned to ODOT. Do not provide any exempt records, to persons other than ODOT employees, without the authorization of the Assistant Attorney General assigned to ODOT.

When a non-ODOT employee is allowed to examine any ODOT records, safeguard the records from theft, damage, or destruction, and record the event in a diary or memorandum. Include the date, place, persons present, and a listing of the records examined.

### Verbal Communication

Verbal communication is the most used communication form. It is very effective, but ODOT employees should remember the following:

- Always remain courteous, even if the communication involves a contentious issue.
- Be sure that the "key" persons are involved if the communication involves direction or requires action or agreement from the other party or parties.
- Assure that each involved party understands what is expected of it, including requested information or timeline for response.
- If ODOT must deny a request, application, etc., remain courteous and assure that the requestor, applicant, etc. understands why ODOT cannot grant the request, application, etc.
- Refer the issue or communication to a person of proper authority or responsibility when needed.
- When agreements are reached, directions are given, or requests are made by verbal communication, it may be appropriate to confirm those agreements, directions, or requests with a written memo. That provides an opportunity for the involved parties to correct a misunderstood statement, if needed. This may be particularly important and helpful when communicating with persons or entities outside ODOT.

Technologies to help accomplish verbal communication include:

1. Radio Systems.

The Wireless Group of the Technical Management Section of the ODOT Information Systems Organization owns and operates ODOT's two-way radio system. This very high frequency (VHF) system serves the daily operational needs of maintenance personnel.

Most radios are installed in vehicles or offices, but flaggers or other appropriate personnel should use hand-held devices.

The *Radio Communications Call Book*, distributed by the Wireless Group, describes the radio network and includes instructions for operation of radio devices.

ODOT also shares the 800 MHZ system that is owned and operated by the City of Portland. The Wireless Group coordinates use of that system.

If the District Manager needs additional radios, submit a written request through the Region to the Wireless Group Manager.

The Wireless Group has service units located at several locations. The District Manager or Transportation Maintenance Manager should contact them to arrange service or relocation of radio units.

Maintain all radio equipment in a clean, dry condition. Assure that batteries for hand-held units are kept fully charged so that they are available for use in emergency situations.

2. Telephone System.

The ODOT telephone system must be used in accordance with applicable ODOT and Department of Administrative Services policies.

ODOT has also provided cellular telephones or pagers to selected personnel so they are available for conversation at most times. Use these devices only in accordance with applicable ODOT policies. Out of courtesy when meeting with others, turn these devices off or refrain from using them.

Written Communication

Written communication is done generally by hard copy letter or memorandum or may be done by electronic mail (e-mail). Hard copies may also be transmitted electronically by facsimile (fax).

Good, effective, written communications include the following guidelines:

- Remember that the written communication reflects the knowledge, care, and reputation of yourself, your unit, and ODOT.
- Be sure that the communication is addressed to the proper person or recipient.
- Be sure to use proper names, titles, and spelling of the names and titles.

- Use good document format, proper grammar, and correct spelling.
- Use simple language and minimize the use of jargon or large words.
- Use short, concise paragraphs.
- Do not include information or comments that could reflect undue criticism on yourself, another ODOT employee, or ODOT.
- It may be helpful to have someone else read the communication to be sure that it really says what is intended, includes all needed information, does not include inappropriate or incorrect information, and specifically identifies needed actions including timelines for response.
- Send a copy of the communication to other parties as appropriate or needed.

Retain written communications according to the *Standard Filing System Manual* discussed above. Also refer to the above discussion if persons, other than ODOT employees, request to see or obtain copies of ODOT records.

#### Communications with the Media and Public

Refer to discussion in the Public Relations section of this Guide regarding communications with the media and the public or persons or entities outside of ODOT.

#### Innovative Methods/Demonstrations/New Ideas

Each District Manager, Transportation Maintenance Manager, and each other ODOT employee is encouraged to identify new or innovative methods or products that may improve the efficiency and effectiveness, thus reducing the cost, of a maintenance activity. Also refer to discussion on the Oregon Employee Suggestion Award Program below.

Involve the District Manager if approval is needed to develop or try the new method or product. Also check with others to see if someone else has already tried the new method or product and may have some experience with it.

After trying the new or modified method or product, share the results with the District Manager. The District Manager should also share that information with other Districts and the State Maintenance Engineer. If the new or modified method or product does improve efficiency and effectiveness, thus reducing cost, others may also wish to adopt it. Also, if the new or modified method or product did not work as planned, or did not reduce the cost of the work, others should be aware of that so they do not duplicate the effort.

The State of Oregon has an Employee Suggestion Award Program. Under that program, an employee may receive a share of the savings that result from a suggestion that produces less cost to the State. For more information, refer to information in the Human Resources website of the ODOT Intranet.