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**UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548**

COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

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REFER TO:

OCT 26 1976

Mr. John R. McGuire  
Chief, Forest Service  
Department of Agriculture

Dear Mr. McGuire:

We have made a limited study of the use of training, including specialized training, provided through formal courses to employees at Forest Service headquarters. We made similar studies at four other Government agencies in the Washington, D.C., area.

We interviewed a selected sample of 31 civilian employees who received training during calendar year 1975 to determine the extent training is or may be used on the job, and to identify the cause and effect of substantial nonutilization. The sample selected was deemed by a Forest Service training official to be representative of the training efforts at Forest Service headquarters. We also interviewed training officials and obtained data from them regarding procedures for insuring utilization of training.

Although most Forest Service employees use part of their training on the job, there were instances of little or no utilization. Headquarters training officials indicated additional efforts will be made to increase use of training. The following information may be of value in helping you to achieve this objective.

BACKGROUND

The Government Employees Training Act (5 U.S.C. 4101 (4)) and the Federal Personnel Manual require that training directly relate to performance of employees' official duties. The Manual states each agency must establish adequate administrative controls to insure training improves performance and contributes to economy, efficiency, and effectiveness of operations. It also urges agencies to follow up on training to assure that knowledge and skills gained are effectively utilized.

The Forest Service reported training costs in excess of \$4,290,000, excluding salaries, in fiscal year 1975.

### UTILIZATION OF TRAINING

The average utilization rate--the percent of training received in selected courses and used on the job as estimated by employees interviewed--is 65 percent at Forest Service headquarters compared to the overall average rate of 56 percent for the five agencies studied. Three Forest Service employees said they had not used any of the training on the job and three used only 10 to 20 percent. Two of these six employees said they may use more of the training in the future; however, their answers indicated uncertainty as to when the training will be used. Reasons cited for not using the training included:

- Training did not apply to job.
- Required course was too elementary for employee.
- Course degenerated into arguments of no value.

When asked why they took courses not used, the responses indicated that courses as described in the pamphlets or brochures appeared to be useful to the employee's job when in actuality they were not.

### FOLLOW UP EVALUATION

The Forest Service was the only agency studied that did not routinely require employees to fill out an evaluation form upon completion of training courses. Training officials said use of the evaluation form was discontinued in calendar year 1975 for they believed such forms were of little value. However, the Forest Service conducted studies during calendar year 1975 of at least two training courses by requesting employees and supervisors to fill out detailed questionnaires concerning the courses' application and usefulness.

Seven of 31 employees interviewed prepared evaluation forms before they were discontinued, 9 employees evaluated the course in informal discussions, and 15 employees reported no follow up. Of the latter, 8 said there should be a follow up, generally because it would help the training office determine whether the course was useful and whether to send others to the course.

The need for evaluation of the usefulness and application of training was discussed with the Employee Development Group Leader, his assistant, and the Personnel Staff Specialist. These officials

implied that more emphasis will be placed on insuring that employees go to the right training course and that the Forest Service will probably continue intensive evaluations of individual courses.

#### CONCLUSIONS

To conform with the Government Employees Training Act and the Federal Personnel Manual, all training should relate to official duties. Nonutilization of training results in inefficient use of training funds and salary costs for the amount of time employees are away from the job, and potential decrease in morale of employees who cannot use their training.

Although the results indicate that most employees used some of their training, there is need for improvement. To insure better use of training, you may wish to require training officials to spend more time evaluating:

- relevance of training courses to the needs of the Forest Service and its employees for improving performance of official duties,
- training of employees who need it most to perform their official duties, and
- application and effectiveness of training provided.

We appreciate the cooperation shown to us by Forest Service headquarters officials during this study. We would appreciate being advised of any action you plan to take.

Copies of this letter are being sent to the Secretary of Agriculture, and the Chairman, United States Civil Service Commission.

Sincerely yours,

  
Brian P. Crowley  
Assistant Director