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United States
Department of
Agriculture

PPQ Policy No. PPQ-DA-03-1

Marketing and
Regulatory
Programs

SUBJECT: Voicemail

February 24, 2003

Animal and
Plant Health
Inspection
Service

TO: All PPQ Employees

Washington, DC
20250

Voicemail is an important tool that allows us to communicate information to callers. It provides an avenue for callers to leave information for us or make requests of us. It also provides the opportunity to give callers an alternative when we cannot be reached. When misused, however, voicemail becomes an obstacle to efficient and effective communication. As with all forms of communication, we need to be mindful of the needs of the caller. With that in mind, the following policy for use of voicemail in PPQ is established:

- Everyone will have an outgoing voicemail message that provides the date and your name and the name of your program, staff, or work unit.
- The outgoing message will be updated daily and will provide information concerning your work status, such as "on leave," "in travel status," "in the office, but in meetings," or "in the office today." If your status changes, the outgoing message will be updated. For instance, if you were to take an unplanned day of sick leave, you would change your message from home that morning to reflect the fact that you will not be in the office.
- In your voicemail message, ask the caller to leave a brief message regarding the purpose of his or her call. This will allow you to respond to them with an answer on their voicemail if they are not there when you return the call.
- The outgoing message should give the caller the option of dialing zero to be transferred to a main phone line. If this option is not available on your phone system, provide an alternative phone number where the caller can obtain additional help. Be sure these options are functional on your phone system.
- Primary phone lines in each work unit should be answered during normal business hours. Voicemail should only be used on a main number for after hours messages or in the event of an emergency, such as a building evacuation.
- When identifying normal business hours for your location, please be mindful of all of your customers. For example, offices in the East that routinely do business with the West Coast or Alaska or Hawaii should ensure that phone lines are covered during hours that give those customers a reasonable window of opportunity to make contact.



- When leaving a message on voice mail, be mindful of the recipient and be sure you leave your name, telephone number, time and date of call and a brief description of the purpose of your call to expedite a response. Speak slowly and clearly so the recipient can retrieve your information accurately.



Richard L. Dunkle
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Plant Protection and Quarantine