

EXECUTIVE ORDER 05-03

PLAIN TALK

WHEREAS, Washington State government strives to provide exceptional customer service, and we recognize that clear easy-to-understand communications are essential to good service. We communicate with businesses and individuals through letters, forms, instructions, announcements, publications and other documents, which are the tools we use to do business with the public. They must be written and designed so that they can be easily understood.

User-friendly documents show our respect for people and their time. They are also good customer service. Clearly written documents make it easier for citizens to understand how to access service and the roles of all parties involved.

The Departments of Revenue, Labor and Industries and Ecology have programs to improve the readability of their letters, instructions, forms and applications. These “Plain Talk” programs have resulted in measurable improvements in customer service and agency performance, including:

- Reduced phone calls and questions from customers;
- Fewer complaints about difficulties doing business with the state; and
- Improved compliance with regulations.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Christine O. Gregoire, Governor of the state of Washington, hereby order that all agencies adopt the principles and practices of Plain Talk currently used in the Departments of Revenue, Labor and Industries and Ecology.

Using Plain Talk principles, the announcements, publications and other documents agencies send to the public will contain clear and concise instructions and information. Documents written in Plain Talk will include:

- Clear language that is commonly used by the intended audience;
- Only the information needed by the recipient, presented in a logical sequence;
- Short sentences;
- Sentences, written in active voice, that make it clear who is responsible for what; and
- Layout and design that help the reader understand the meaning on the first try. This includes adequate white space, bulleted lists, helpful headings and other proven techniques.

Guidance for implementation will be provided by the Governor's Office of Management, Accountability and Performance.

This executive order takes effect immediately.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the State of Washington to be Affixed at Olympia this 24th day of March A.D., Two thousand five.

CHRISTINE O. GREGOIRE
Governor of Washington

BY THE GOVERNOR:
Secretary of State