



Computer Support Newsletter

This newsletter is published mainly to inform MSA employees of Information Technology (IT) news and happenings. Please remember to send all requests for IT help to:

MSA-Helpdesk@ars.usda.gov

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Volume I

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Outlook Web Access Suspended

As you have probably discovered by now, you can no longer access your ARS email from the web based link. (<https://mail.ars.usda.gov>). Outlook Web Access was suspended by USDA-OCIO on January 14, 2009.

A severe cyber security threat was identified that required the U.S. Department of Agriculture and all USDA agencies to immediately shut down the Outlook Web Access (OWA) application. OWA is the application that ARS was using to access email via the internet through personal computers, laptops, Treos and other PDA devices.

ARS has provided a means for users to still have normal access to your email from your office desktops/laptops and Blackberry devices.

If you need to access your email when away from your office, your local computer contact will be able to inform you of the options available.

While the OWA suspension is causing a significant inconvenience to many, the action is of utmost importance to protect the integrity of USDA computer systems and to allow USDA to continue to conduct business electronically with other federal agencies.



The MSA IT Office will provide updates on the situation as they become available. If you have any questions concerning the OWA suspension, please send them to:

MSA-Helpdesk@ars.usda.gov.

Laptop Best Practices

If you have a laptop that you use during travel or for research away from your office, it is important that you keep your laptop protected with the latest Windows updates as well as the most current anti virus signatures.

It is a good practice to periodically connect your laptop to the ARS network to get critical updates and to get the latest virus signatures. This will

provide better protection should you need to use your laptop on another network.

If you have connected your laptop to a network outside ARS, including a home or hotel wire, it is imperative that the laptop be scanned for viruses **before** it is connected to the ARS network.

Another good practice is to plug your laptop into a power

source to help maintain the battery. When left unused for an extended period of time, laptop batteries can lose their ability to maintain a charge.

It is also important to have a secure password on your laptop and to keep your laptop secure at all times. Do not leave your laptop unattended and do not attach your password to your laptop or leave the password in the laptop bag.



So You Have a New Computer.....

Did you know that a new computer is obsolete as soon as you take it out of the box? No matter if the computer is the "latest and greatest" it will need to be updated as soon as you unpack it. The average computer will require over 20 Windows updates straight from the box. If you install MS Office, the computer will require even more updates.

Make sure that you check every application for updates as soon as they are installed.

In order for agency applications (such as AgLearn) to run properly, do not install any tool bar add-ons such as Yahoo, Google, etc. These toolbars create problems when trying to complete courses in AgLearn. It is also necessary to have the latest version of Java and Adobe Flash Player installed on the computer and to remove any previous versions of Java.

Computers must be password protected and have the USDA warning banner installed. It is a good practice to set a screen-

saver with password protection that will require you to enter your password after the screensaver comes active.

Also, as a reminder, there is still a moratorium on purchasing computers with Vista. Windows XP Professional is still the required operating system for all computers in ARS.

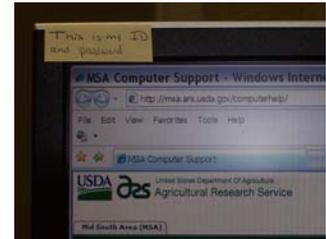
If you have any questions or problems with your computer, your local computer contact will be able to assist you.

"Do not write passwords on a sticky note and post them on your monitor."

Password Security

Password management can be a nightmare. It is often difficult to remember every ID and password for the many different systems users access. There is your Windows password, your email password, your e-Authentication password, NFC password, and the list goes on and on.

If you must write down your IDs and passwords so you can remember them, **DO NOT** write them on a sticky note and post the note on your monitor, under your keyboard, under your mouse or in any easily viewed location. Store the recorded IDs and passwords in a locked drawer or cabinet in a secure location.



This photo was taken from about 10' away using a standard zoom camera.



Start the year off on the right track and be a good password steward!

Password Alert

Your ARSnet password (used for Outlook, SharePoint, eForms and by REE updaters) expires after 60 days. You will receive an email notification as the expiration date nears. If you do not change your password **BEFORE** the expiration date, your password will expire and you will not be able to access your email. You will then be required to call your password reset contact to get your password reset.

ARSNet - Password Alert

Start the year off on the right track and be a good password steward. Mark your calendar and make a habit of changing your password on a regular schedule **before** it expires.

Password requirements for ARSnet:

- Contains at least 12 characters
- Must use at least one of each of the following:

Password Expiration Alert

1. Uppercase character
 2. Lowercase character
 3. Numerals
 4. Non-alphabetic characters (such as ?, \$, #)
- Has not been used in the previous 24 passwords

ARSnet Password Change Site:

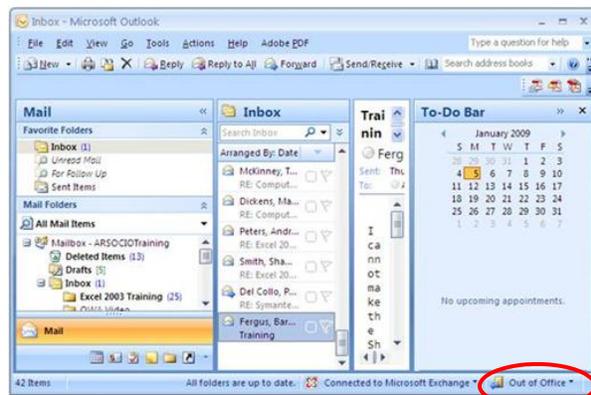
<https://secure.arsnet.usda.gov/ChangeMyPassword.aspx>

Out of Office Assistant from OCIO

Did you use the Out of Office Assistant during the holidays or when you were away from your office? In Outlook 2003, when you return and enter Outlook you receive a pop-up message asking if you would like to turn off your Out of Office Assistant.

In Outlook 2007, a pop-up message does not appear. When you return and log into Outlook, you will have to re-

member to turn it off. If you look at the bottom right hand corner of your monitor, you will see the Out of Office Assistant is turned on (see picture on the right). To turn it off you simply click where it says Out of Office and choose “Turn off Out of Office auto-replies” or you can select **Tools| Out of Office Assistant** and choose “I am currently in the Office.”



Screenshot showing Out of Office Indicator

Creating a Task from an E-mail Message from OCIO

If you receive an e-mail message with details about a project, you can use that e-mail message to create a task to remind you about the project task.

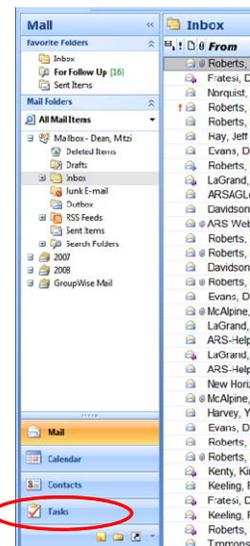
Follow these steps to create a task from an e-mail message in your inbox:

- In your message list, using your mouse, select the e-mail message
- Drag the message to the Tasks folder in the Navigation Pane. (The Task Window will appear.)
- Enter a subject in the Subject text box.
- Select the date when the task is due.
- Select a priority if necessary
- Select a date when you

want to be reminded of the task.

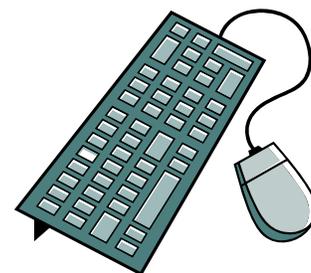
- Click Save and Close.

Try this tip the next time you receive an e-mail notifying you of upcoming training requirements. This will enable you to set a reminder so you will remember to complete your training on time.



Microsoft Word Shortcuts from OCIO

- **Shift-F3:** Toggle selected text between lowercase, initial capitals, and uppercase.
- **F4:** Repeat your last action, including searching, typing, and formatting.
- **Ctrl-F6:** Toggle between open documents
- **F7:** Run the spell checker
- **F12:** Open the Save As dialog
- **Ctrl-A:** Selects all texts and graphics in the active window
- **Ctrl-C:** Copies the selection to clipboard
- **Ctrl-X:** Cuts selected text
- **Ctrl-V:** Paste-Inserts the contents of the clipboard at the insertion point (cursor)
- **Ctrl-Z:** Undo the last action
- **Ctrl-Y:** Redo-After an action has been undone, it can be reinstated in the document



USDA-ARS

Mid South Area IT Office
141 Experiment Station Road
P. O. Box 225
Stoneville, Mississippi 38776

Phone: 662-686-5305
Fax: 662-686-5373

E-mail:
MSA-Helpdesk@ars.usda.gov

[http://msa.ars.usda.gov/
computerhelp/](http://msa.ars.usda.gov/computerhelp/)

Peer-to-Peer (P2P)

The use of P2P software is prohibited on all USDA equipment and networks. In accordance with Office of Management and Budget Memo 04-06 on File Sharing Technology, "Federal computer systems or networks (as well as those operated by Contractors on the government's behalf) must not be used for downloading of illegal and/or unauthorized copyrighted content." USDA does not consider "Limited Personal Use Policy" defined in DR 3300-1 or ARS P&P 253.4 as justification for downloading P2P programs that perform those functions. P2P is a protocol often used to obtain freeware, shareware, and bootleg software. P2P exchange is made practical through web sites that act as clearinghouses listing people who have or want something. Some P2P applications allow computer users to directly access files from another hard drive such as music (mp3), movies and documents. Other types of P2P applications include gaming, telephony, and instant messaging.

The following list gives examples of some P2P software divided by category.

Instant Messaging/ Telephony

- Yahoo Messenger
- Windows Messenger
- MSN Messenger
- AOL Instant Messenger
- Skype

File Sharing

- Bit Torrent
- Gnutella
- Kazaa
- WinMX
- Napster
- PC Anywhere
- Edonkey
- Morpheus
- EMule
- Limewire
- BearShare
- Timbuktu

Instant Messaging/Telephony allows users to chat via text messaging in real time in addition to sharing files and initiating telephone calls over the

Internet. File sharing and gaming allows users to search each other's hard drives for specific files or information. P2P file sharing can potentially compromise computer systems. USDA Cyber Security is monitoring all USDA networks for P2P traffic. Upon detection of this traffic, the ARS-OCIO, Cyber Security Branch will be notified via the Incident Handling Process. Having this software installed and/or running on Government equipment or networks is prohibited and appropriate disciplinary action will be taken. If you currently have this type of software installed on your government equipment, it must be removed. Should you require assistance to remove this software, please contact your local computer support staff.



Valentine's Day Malicious Code

US-CERT is aware of public reports of malicious code circulating via spam email messages related to Valentine's Day. These messages contain a link to a website that contains several images of hearts and instructs users to choose one image. If users click on one of the images, they will be prompted to download an executable file. Reports indicate that the executable files could be named: youandme.exe, onlyyou.exe, you.exe, and meandyou.exe (please note that these file names may change at any time). If users accept the download, malicious code may be installed onto their systems.

US-Cert encourages users and administrators to take the following preventative measures to help mitigate the security risks:

- Install antivirus software, and keep virus signatures up to date
- Do not follow unsolicited links and do not open unsolicited email messages.
- Use caution when visiting untrusted websites
- Use caution when downloading and installing applications.

- Refer to the Recognizing and Avoiding Email Scams (pdf) document for more information on avoiding email scams. (http://www.us-cert.gov/reading_room/emailsams_0905.pdf)
- Refer to the Avoiding Social Engineering and Phishing Attacks document for more information on social engineering attacks. (<http://www.us-cert.gov/cas/tipsST04-014.html>)

