United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
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CIVIL RIGHTS DIRECTIVE NO. 2008-05

TO: Bureau and Office Equal Opportunity Officers

FROM: Sharon D. Eller
Director, Office of Civil Rights

SUBJECT: Open Captioning of Audio-Visual Media

Section 504 and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, provides that all Departmental programs be accessible to employees and visitors with disabilities. Section 508, specifically, provides for all audio-visual media to be open or closed captioned. This provides effective communication for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Based on numerous compliance reviews over time, it has been found that open captioning provides the most effective and efficient method of access to the substantial amount of audio-visual media used by Departmental Bureau each day. Even where closed captioned media is available, it has been found that much staff time and effort is often taken to ensure that captioning is turned off and on in a timely manner for participants with disabilities. Also, switches may be easily broken or tampered with causing a possible lengthy period of non-compliance.

Thus, this Directive requires for all new and non-captioned Departmental audio-visual media to be open captioned and all existing open/closed captioned Departmental audio-visual media to remain in the open captioned position at all times. Switches are to be secured so as not to be easily vandalized or mistakenly turned off.

The U.S. General Services Administration's Office of Governmentwide Policy, Information Technology Accessibility & Workforce Division, has been charged with the task of educating Federal employees and building the infrastructure necessary to support Section 508 implementation. They have implemented a free training module (Accessible Video and Multimedia) on how to create and evaluate video and multimedia products that are accessible to all audiences. To access this free training module please visit http://www.section508.gov. The "Accessible Video and Multimedia" course will allow individuals to discover the elements and steps for adding audio descriptions and captioning to any product.

Compliance by all Bureaus to this Directive is imperative to effectively provide access for program participants and employees who are deaf or hard of hearing. This in no way negates our responsibility to provide assistive listening devices for program participants who are hard of hearing.

Distribution: All Bureau/Office Equal Opportunity Officers

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Expiration: When Superseded