



consultations

To assist and inform the diplomatic community

Program Support: OFM's Frontline

While standing near the front desk reception area of Program Support you might hear any of the following expressions on any given day:

"Is my driver's license here yet?"; "I'm here to get my country's mail."; "Where do I put this delivery?"; "I have an appointment with Mrs. Robinson."; "Is this where I put the Custom's papers?"; "I'm a courier, rush it up, please!"; "Can I put these in the country folders for you?"; "What name do I put on this check for my license plates?"; "Has the mail been delivered here yet?"; "Do you have a screwdriver?"



Betty Wilson is quality control inspector for documents produced by Program Support. See photo of Program Support team on page 3 in "Faces of OFM." Photo courtesy of Said Rida.

In response to the last question, the person behind the desk smiles and explains that OFM has a hard time holding on to such a tool because it frequently seems to vanish when someone needs to remove license plates from a vehicle.

The customer service representative at the front desk on the first floor of the Office of Foreign Missions facility at 3507 International Place in northwest Washington, DC, is a member of the Program Support team, described as "the face of OFM" because of their daily interface with the diplomatic community. The reception duties are just some of the many tasks each team member must master. On a rotating basis, the staff may be detailed to the production of U.S. Department of State documents such as registration and titling documents, or the issuance of vehicle license plates, driver licenses, and tax exemption cards. OFM's recent merger with the Office of Protocol's Production Unit added identification cards and accreditation letters to its document processing requirements.

The skills required to produce each type of document must be learned during the rotational assignments. These skills include application screening, data entry, and referral of applications to others for advice and adjudication, production and distribution of documents and records maintenance. Some documents may entail

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New OFM Regional Office to Open in Miami

Location: Miami, Florida Area

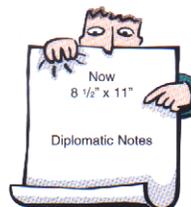
When: Summer 2001

Region: The region will include the Mid-Atlantic and Southeastern States, presently covered by the Washington, DC headquarters staff

Mission: To provide service and outreach to the consular community, local authorities and general public and to facilitate the handling of tax exemption and motor vehicle documents.

Watch for more information on the Miami Office Opening.

The New Look of Diplomatic Notes



Effective February 1, 2001, United States diplomatic notes will be conveyed on standard (8 1/2" x 11") rather than on legal size (8 1/2" x 13") paper stock. The new paper size, initiated by the Office of Foreign Missions, has been implemented to improve diplomatic communication.

Two new types of letter-size stationery have been designed, one for first-person diplomatic notes from the Department only and a second for third person notes. Both are imprinted with the words "Diplomatic Note" centered at the bottom of the page.

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OFM Procedure

Procedure for Obtaining Tax Relief before Purchasing a Vehicle

Upon arriving in the United States or over the course of a tour of duty here, many members of the diplomatic community may wish to purchase a vehicle. To ensure proper tax exemption and registration, the Office of Foreign Missions asks that mission members adhere to the following guidelines.

When a mission member has decided upon the purchase of a vehicle, he or she should advise the dealer of their exemption from the taxes (sales, excise and luxury) on the purchase, registration and/or titling of the vehicle. This exemption reflects the status of one's assignment as a member of a foreign mission in the United States and the fact that the vehicle will be registered with the U.S. Department of State.

The dealer will need some verification that the buyer is exempt from the payment of these taxes. The verification of exemption must be obtained from the U.S. Department of State's Office of Foreign Missions. The dealership can write or call the Office of Foreign Missions for a letter of exemption. The letter may be

mailed or faxed back to the sales agent. This letter will allow the foreign mission member to purchase the vehicle without payment of taxes and will eliminate the need to request a tax refund later, which can be a lengthy process. Prior to preparing this letter, the Office of Foreign Missions will request proof of intent to purchase a vehicle. As proof of purchase, a copy of the dealership's purchase order and certificate of origin and/or title, bearing the name of the mission or mission member(s), must be faxed to the Office of Foreign Missions' Diplomatic Motor Vehicle Office at 202-895-3646, and the original documents must be mailed to this same office.

Again, before purchasing a vehicle:

1. Advise dealer of one's status
2. Ask dealer to contact OFM for letter of exemption
3. Submit proof of intent to purchase to OFM
 - Copy of purchase order
 - Certificate of origin and or title bearing name of mission or mission member



Frequently Asked Questions



Motor Vehicle Moving Violations

Q. What is OFM policy on motor vehicle violations?

A. OFM's traffic violations policy is based on the principle that persons enjoying privileges and immunities in the United States are nevertheless obliged to respect United States laws and regulations. The policy also rests on the principle that the operation of a motor vehicle in the United States by such persons is not a right but a privilege that may be withdrawn in cases of abuse. OFM acknowledges that the great majority of members of the foreign mission community operate motor vehicles responsibly and in compliance with local traffic laws and regulations. However, when cited for traffic violations, it is important that mission members take the necessary steps to resolve such offenses. OFM neither intervenes with local jurisdictions to contest cited violations on behalf of persons with immunity, nor does it have the authority to dismiss violations or cancel fines associated with traffic citations. When OFM is informed that a traffic citation or summons has been issued to a Department of State licensee, in each reported case, we inform the appropriate mission of the incident and advise on the methods of resolving the particular offense.

Q. How does one properly resolve traffic citations?

A. Mission members who are cited for violations that impose a preset fine are expected either to pay the fine or contest the violation in the appropriate forum. OFM has no authority to adjudicate, modify, or cancel fines associated with traffic violations. We therefore urge mission and family members who believe they have been cited unjustly to go to traffic court and contest the violation. OFM will assign points to the individual's driving record to reflect the violation if the preset fine is paid or the violation is upheld in court. In 2000, there were nearly 100 prepayable citations issued to Department licensees nationwide.

A motor vehicle law violation that requires a court appearance is commonly referred to as a "must appear" offense. The citation or court summons issued for this type of violation does not impose a preset fine that a mission member can pay in lieu of a court appearance. Rather, due to the seriousness of the offense, an adjudication is required and the individual is summoned to appear in court.

Some common examples of "must appear" traffic offenses include the following: reckless driving (in several states, including Virginia, New York, Connecticut, and New Jersey, exceeding the posted speed limit by more than 20 m.p.h. is a reckless driving offense); driving under the influence (DUI) of alcohol or drugs; driving while intoxicated (DWI); driving without a valid license or driving while under a driving privilege suspension. In some jurisdictions, such as Virginia, any traffic violation involving a motor vehicle accident will result in a "must appear" summons.

Faces of OFM



Program Support team: In back from left to right: Marcia Young, Francesta Thorne, Carla Savoy, Sandra Foster, Ernest Evans, Kimberly Gilchrist, Eboni Borden, Clay Hays (Acting Program Support Chief). In front from left to right: Cynthia Howard, Abigail Vasquez (Protocol Unit Supervisor), Susan Higgins, Valencia Harris, Nora Robinson, Josephine Garcilazo, Jerena Hallmon, and Jason Adams. Not present: Paula Shortridge. See article on front page.

(Moving Violations continued from pg 2)

Should a mission member or family member be cited for a "must appear" traffic violation that requires adjudication, OFM will request a formal waiver of immunity to allow local adjudication of the matter. If a waiver of immunity is granted, and the individual goes to court and contests the violation on its merits, OFM will abide by the disposition of the court and assess violation points to a mission member's driving record only if the violation is upheld. If a waiver of immunity is not granted, upon receiving a written denial from the sending State involved prior to the scheduled hearing date, OFM will certify to the court that the mission or family member is immune from its jurisdiction and cannot appear for the hearing. OFM then will assess the appropriate number of violation points to the mission member's driving record.

Q. What is the point system?

A. OFM maintains driving records for all persons with U.S. Department of State driver licenses and has developed a point system to record moving violations. Typical prepayable violations result in a 2- to 4-point assessment on an individual's Department driving record. More serious "must appear" violations usually result in a 6- to 8-point assessment. The Department automatically suspends driving privileges should a mission or family member accumulate 12 or more points on his or her driving record within a 24-month period. The first-time suspension for the accumulation of excessive points is up to 90 days. On an annual basis, OFM typically suspends the driving privileges of three or four mission members for accumulating 12 or more points on their licenses in a 24-month period.

Q. How does OFM handle alcohol-related driving offenses like driving while intoxicated (DWI) or driving under the influence (DUI)?

A. Alcohol-related driving offenses present a particularly serious threat to public safety. In the case of a first-time DUI or DWI offense which does not involve death or personal injury to another, OFM suspends driving privileges for no less than one year should a mission or family member's immunity not be waived to permit adjudication in accordance with local law.

Should the sending State waive immunity to allow local adjudication, OFM will abide by the court's disposition of the DUI or DWI charge. Should the violation be upheld, OFM expects the mission member to satisfy any fines imposed by the court, as well as to comply with any probationary conditions stipulated by the court in its disposition of the case. OFM will assess the appropriate number of points to the mission member's driving record, and impose its own driving suspension based on the court's disposition.

Consistent with its obligations as the exclusive driver licensing authority for members of foreign missions, OFM takes very seriously allegations of alcohol-related driving offenses presented in official police reports. When immunity has prevented arrest or the formal filing of a DWI or DUI charge, the Department may impose administrative driving suspensions based on such written allegations. Suspension of driving privileges on this basis is a separate administrative action which OFM may take independent of a local jurisdiction's determination to pursue a criminal prosecution in a particular alcohol-related driving case.

Once a mission or family member's driving privilege has been suspended, the Department requests that the embassy guarantee that an alleged offender not operate a motor vehicle in the United States for the duration of a suspension. Should a mission member fail to comply with an OFM driving suspension, he or she will be required to depart the United States.



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(Moving Violations continued from pg 3)

Consistent with our deep concern regarding the potentially tragic consequences presented by alcohol-related driving incidents, should a mission or family member be involved in a second DWI or DUI offense during an assignment in the U.S., it is OFM's policy to require that individual's departure from the United States.

Additionally, under Department regulations, serious motor vehicle offenses include the crimes of DWI, DUI and reckless driving where those crimes result in death or personal injury to another. In such a case, if the Department's request for waiver of immunity is declined, it is the Department's policy to require the alleged offender to leave the

United States. In an exceptional case, the Department may require a mission or family member to depart even if a waiver is granted and the offense is adjudicated in the United States.

Q. Did OFM require any departures from the U.S. last year for motor vehicle violations?

A. In 2000, two mission members were required to depart the U.S. for alcohol-related offenses: in one case the sending State declined to waive immunity for a DWI involving personal injury to two others, and the other case involved a repeat DWI offender.

It's Tax Time Again!

This is tax season in the United States. Whereas most diplomats are exempt from the payment of U.S. taxes, there may be situations where tax liability exist, such as monies earned on United States investments while diplomats are residing in the United States. Diplomats who have questions regarding their tax liability may leave a recorded message with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) at 202 874-1460. You may also e-mail your questions to IRS tax experts using the IRS website www.irs.ustreas.gov/prod/help/newmail/user.html.

April 15 is the date Federal taxes are due. If a person is required to pay Federal taxes, he/she is normally liable for state taxes as well, and should contact the state tax commissioner for more information.

Please help us keep your mailing address up to date. Call 202 895-3507 or send an e-mail to Consultation@state.gov

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specialized processes. A team member assigned to the production of driver licenses, for example, may need to take photos, administer eye tests, or direct an applicant to a local motor vehicle office for written exams and road testing.

Customer service is of utmost importance to the Program Support team. The team strives to process each completed document within specified timeframes. The goal is to have license plates, driver licenses, and tax exemption cards ready in 2 to 3 days in Washington, DC, and New York, and in 6 to 11 days in all other OFM regional offices. OFM conducts client service surveys in its continuing effort to improve service to the foreign mission community. Questions are designed not only to gauge performance but also to learn about new requirements for service. Respondents recently reported a need for enhanced outreach activities and for an expansion of OFM's presence in other areas of the country. OFM plans to open a new regional office in Miami this year (see announcement on first page).

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