

What's New With The MOU?

Good News! The county MOU legislation, known as AB 399, has passed through the Assembly and (as of this newsletter printing - 6/25/01) is currently in the Senate. After approval by the Senate, the next step in the process will be presentation of the bill to the Governor for his signature.

The MOU agreement indicates that the Board of Supervisors will review and adopt each section of the new legislation before it can be implemented by LACERA. The MOU also states that some of the benefits will not be presented to the Board of Supervisors for adoption until the Ventura case, which is currently unsettled in Superior Court, has been resolved. However, all proposals are contingent upon LACERA using available and future surplus funds to pay for the benefits.

The effective date for the proposed MOU benefits will not be earlier than July 1, 2001, and may be later depending upon when the bill is signed by the Governor, when the Board of Supervisors issues their resolutions, and when LACERA determines the funding.

AMENDMENTS TO THE MOU

Safety Member Employee Contribution Pick-Up

On May 15, 2001, the Board of Supervisors amended the MOU by agreeing to subsidize employee contributions into Safety Plan B by paying 2% of an employee's rate beginning July 1, 2001, subsidizing an additional 1% effective July 1, 2002. Similar to the other MOU benefits, this benefit is contingent upon LACERA using available surplus funds to pay for the benefit and to pay for future costs resulting from the Ventura case. The Board of Investments is reviewing the funding proposal.

Plan E Early Retirement Factors

Previously, we reported that this benefit established Plan E early retirement factors at the more favorable 1982 levels, regardless of future actuarial valuations. Since then, the County amended AB 399 to keep the retirement factors at their current levels, regardless of future actuarial valuation recommendations. (Plan E retirement benefits are based on normal retirement at age 65. If you retire earlier, your allowance will be reduced by early retirement factor applications. The early retirement factors are calculated by the actuary and are based on interest rate assumptions and life expectancy trends.)

LTD Benefit Amendment

Currently, if a Plan E member is totally disabled and on LTD (Long Term Disability) benefits, his or her retirement-eligible salary is frozen when the member terminates service. The amendment to AB 399 allows the Plan E member receiving LTD benefits to receive salary adjustments up to 2% per year, based on the CPI (consumer price index), from their termination date to their retirement date.

Please keep in mind, there is no guarantee that any of these benefit enhancements will be approved. They are under consideration and you will be notified if and when they are enacted.

LACERA
POSTSCRIPT

P.S.
PLANNING A SECURE FUTURE

LOS ANGELES EMPLOYEES RETIREMENT ASSOCIATION

VOL. 11 NO. 2

NEWS FOR ACTIVE MEMBERS

JUNE 2001

ADA Requirements Enacted at LACERA

In LACERA's continuing efforts to be compliant with the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements, we have recently completed the following projects:

- Installed assistive listening devices in the Board Room for the hearing impaired;
- Established access to American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters;
- Installation of temporary handicapped seating signs in the Board Room (permanent signs will be installed as we continue with the Public Counter and Board Room renovations);
- Ability to accept all TTY/TDD (assistive telephone equipment for the hearing impaired) operator relay calls when they come in.
- As publications are reprinted (LACERA's brochures, forms, newsletters, etc.), they will heretofore indicate the availability of the material in alternative formats.

Effective immediately, LACERA will place the following text at the bottom of all public agendas/notices:

"Assistive Listening Devices are available upon request. Agendas in alternative formats are available upon request and with at least three (3) business days notice before the meeting date. American Sign Language (ASL) Interpreters are also available with at least three (3) business days notice before the meeting date. Please telephone 626-564-6000 from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday."

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When Will I Receive My Annual Benefit Statement?

Benefit statements are prepared on the 15th of the month following your birthday month. For instance, whether you were born on June 1 or June 29, your statement is prepared on July 15. After your yearly benefits have been calculated, it normally takes about 2-3 weeks for the statement to be printed and mailed. So those born in June should expect to receive their statements around the end of July or early August, those born in July should get their statements around the end of August or early September, etc.

Happy Birthday!



Information Kiosks Installed at LACERA

In June, computer kiosks were installed in the LACERA lobby to enable our members to view our web site. Using these computer terminals, our members can now access the LACERA site to research all the latest information on what's going on and what's coming up. These kiosks are available for use by all members, and we encourage you to come on down and give them a try when you visit LACERA. If you don't have a computer at home, this is a great opportunity to check out what the association has to offer online.

The LACERA web site is full of information, from benefits to healthcare to investments. We even feature archived issues of P.S., if you want to go back and reread a favorite article. So the next time you pay us a visit, take a moment to stop by the Public Counter in the LACERA lobby and access our web site.

The Beessssssssssss Are Here!

Nests have been found in the desert areas of Imperial, Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego counties. There are things you can do to make your environment safer and reduce your risk.

Africanized Honey Bees usually travel in swarms when they move from one nest to another. Check for nests and have a pest control company remove any that are found. Instruct family members to use caution when they come in contact with bees. If a swarm chases you, cover your face and eyes, run away quickly in a straight line, and take shelter in a car or building. The farther you get from the bees the better.

If you are stung by a bee, remove the stinger quickly by scraping, not squeezing, wash the affected area with soap and water and apply an ice pack to relieve the pain. Consult a doctor if you are allergic to bee stings or experience difficulty breathing. Think safety!

Public Service Announcement:

Heart Disease Prevention Study

The USC Atherosclerosis Research Unit is continuing its study on atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries). The study is funded by the National Institute on Aging, and will help determine whether B-vitamin supplementation prevents or slows the progression of atherosclerosis.

If you are at least 40 years old, do not have heart disease, and are willing to take B-vitamins for 2.5 years, you may qualify for this major health disease study. Minorities and individuals older than 50 years of age are especially encouraged to participate in the study.

Participation is free and easy, and will take place in a modern clinical facility on the USC health campus. If you qualify, you will receive free cholesterol and blood pressure measurements, EKGs, ultrasound scans of the neck arteries, and other health monitoring. All procedures are non-invasive and painless, and involve no risk.

For more information, call the Atherosclerosis Research Unit toll-free at 866-240-1489, Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., or visit them online at their web site, at <http://www.usc.edu/medicine/aru>.

Conserve, Conserve, Conserve

With Californians facing a very hot and power-hungry summer, LACERA is doing our part to help conserve. As we strive to save as much energy as we can, there are some specific things we are doing now to keep our consumption down:

- reduced overhead lighting during work hours
- setting air conditioning at a moderate temperature
- using natural lighting wherever possible
- turning off computers, printers, and monitors when not in use

You can help conserve at home, too. You've probably heard all these energy saving tips before, but it never hurts to hear them just one more time. And with many power companies giving bill-lowering incentives for reducing your usage, saving energy isn't just prudent - it's money-smart.

Turn off those lights.

If a light is on and the room is empty...is the energy use efficient? A resounding "No!" Turn off the lights when you leave a room, even if you'll only be gone for 10 minutes.

Shut down the computer.

These days, it seems like there's a computer - or two - in every household. To avoid useless power drain, turn off the computer, printer, and all peripherals when you're not using them.

Laundry at night.

It's no coincidence that most blackouts occur during the day. After all, that's when most people are at work, using computers and sitting under florescent lights. By washing clothes at night, you can personally help save energy. Plus you won't be as hot when you fold those clothes!

Turn off the A/C when you're not home.

Coming home to a cool apartment is a luxury, not a necessity. Unless you've got pets at home that need to stay cool, set the air above 80 degrees when you leave for work in the morning.

EMERGENCY READINESS TIPS

If you were in an earthquake, fire, or power outage today, would you know what to do? Are you ready to face the challenges that could arise in an emergency? The National Fire Protection Association, California Governor's Office of Emergency Services, and NBC4 have put together some important information on prevention and safety, for your reference. Familiarize yourself with the Emergency Readiness Tips below, and remember: Always be prepared!

FIRE

- Have two escape routes from each room in your house and business.
- Make sure all smoke detectors are in proper working order.
- Remove dead branches overhanging your roof.
- Never leave food unattended on the stove.
- If you have a smoker in your home, make sure that all ashtrays are sturdy.
- Keep all matches and lighters out of the reach of children.

EARTHQUAKE

- Prepare an emergency kit of food, water, and supplies.
- Conduct a practice drill so you know what to do when a shaker hits.
- Choose an out-of-state friend or relative that you and others can contact about your whereabouts and condition after a quake.
- Learn how to shut off gas, water, and electricity if the lines are damaged.
- Keep breakable, heavy, and flammable objects in secured cabinets and low shelves.

LOSS OF POWER OR BLACKOUT

- If you're in an elevator, stay calm. You are not in imminent danger. Many buildings have elevators that are automatically routed to the first floor a few minutes after an emergency. Ask your building custodian about elevator emergency measures.
- If you're in your car, be aware that traffic signals will lose power. Be patient and remember that other drivers are in the same situation as you are.
- If you are at home, keep the refrigerator door closed to save foods from spoiling. Once the power's back on, take an inventory of your perishables and remember: When in doubt - throw it out!
- Turn off computers, radios, TVs, and other electrical appliances to avoid damage from power surges once the power is restored.
- Don't forget to reset clocks when the power's back on!

As the Months Get Hotter, Drink More Water!

Water is the most abundant and essential substance in the body. It transports nutrients and oxygen to cells and carries away waste products, acts as a lubricant and cushion for the joints, helps to regulate body temperature, and even aids in preventing constipation.

Everyone loses about 68 oz of water a day, mostly through perspiration and urination. This water must be replaced to prevent excessive loss (dehydration). If you lose more than 80 oz of water in a day, you could experience muscle weakness, fatigue, dizziness, headaches, confusion, forgetfulness, or an elevated heart rate!

Thirst is an indication that you should drink, but even after your thirst goes away you still may not be fully hydrated. A good indicator of whether you need water is your urine concentration. If it's clear, this means it's diluted, suggesting adequate fluid intake.

The general recommendation is to drink at least 6-8, 8-oz glasses of water per day. This can be accomplished by drinking water as well as other fluids, and by eating foods that contain a large percentage of water like fruits, vegetables, and soups. Caffeinated beverages and alcohol aren't good hydrators because they promote water excretion.

You may need more water when you exercise, when the weather is unusually hot or cold, or when you have certain medical problems. Now that summer is here, you should be especially aware of dehydration. If you know you're going to be spending time outside, bring a bottle of water with you, and hydrate first—don't wait till you feel sick before you remember to drink something. And don't forget the sunscreen!

Legislative Updates

The following bills amending the County Employee Retirement Law are currently pending in the State Legislature and were evaluated during the recently conducted legislative session.

AB 196 Blood-borne Diseases (Correa)

As amended, this bill would eliminate the current requirement that a safety member must show exposure to blood or blood products on the job before being able to claim a disability due to having a blood-borne disease. It would also change Workers' Compensation law to include any "blood-borne infectious disease" in the definition of "injury." To accomplish that change, this bill would expand the current reference to "hepatitis" to "blood-borne infectious disease."

AB 1254 (Florez), AB 1385 (Romero), SB 695 (Karnette), SB 1018 (Perata)

These bills would provide safety retirement and those expanded disability benefits to local prosecutors (AB 1254), police officers and park rangers (AB 1385), peace officers (SB 695), and local prosecutors and public defenders (SB 1018).

Specifically, these bills:

- 1) Contain intent language that the Legislature recognize the "more than ordinary risks" which those employed as local prosecutors, police officers and park rangers, peace officers, and public defenders face in their daily work;
- 2) Require that they be included in the same retirement classification as local safety members in the same jurisdiction;
- 3) Allow individuals to opt to remain in their current non-safety status if they wish;
- 4) Specify that they will receive credit as safety members for all their local service before becoming a safety member, and specify that "Any unfunded liability resulting from this section shall be paid by the employer;"
- 5) Include local prosecutors, police officers and park rangers, peace officers, and public defenders under the Labor Code Section 4850, which provides that local safety members who may become disabled are entitled to up to one year off with pay before taking disability retirement or returning to the job;
- 6) Add the definitions of "local prosecutors," "police officers and park rangers," "peace officers," and "public defenders" to the Government Code and to the Labor Code.

AB 1665 (Ashburn)

Under current 37 Act law, the alternate safety member of the county retirement board may act in the absence of the safety member, the retired member, or any of the other elected members of the board. This bill would authorize the remaining 17 county retirement systems to establish a system whereby the retired members of the county could elect an alternate retired member to represent them on the board whenever the retired member was absent.

SB 304 (Karnette)

Current law in the 37 Act allows counties to require that certain safety members retire at specific maximum ages. Los Angeles County mandates that certain sheriffs and undersheriffs retire at age 60 or 70. This bill applies only to Los Angeles County and would allow the board of supervisors in that county to disregard that mandatory retirement provision for an assistant sheriff or a chief in a sheriff's office who is a safety member and whose primary duties are administrative. Because SB 304 is an Urgency bill, it would become effective the day the Governor signed it rather than the following January 1, as is normally the case.

Thank You, Assemblyman Chavez!

LACERA would like to extend a very sincere thank you to Assemblyman Edward Chavez, 57th Assembly District, who successfully carried AB 1214, which is on the Governor's desk for signature.

Why is this bill important to Plan E members?

If an active member retires prior to age 62 and paid into Social Security while a member of the County, LACERA is required by law to reduce the monthly retirement allowance using actuarial tables—whether or not the member will be eligible to receive Social Security benefits. AB 1214 allows the member to present an estimate of their benefits from Social Security, and if the estimate is lower than the actuarial amount, LACERA will reduce the allowance based on the more accurate Social Security estimate. If the member's estimate is zero, LACERA won't reduce the allowance at all.

Due to no small effort on Assemblyman Chavez's part, this bill passed with unanimous approval by the Senate and Assembly.

AB 1214, if signed by the Governor, must be implemented by a resolution from the Board of Supervisors to be effective.

In addition to his duties as Assemblyman in the 57th District, Assemblyman Chavez serves on numerous La Puente commissions and boards, and his efforts on behalf of the residents of the 57th Assembly District and surrounding communities have been much appreciated. LACERA thanks Assemblyman Chavez for supporting the Retirement Association, and we will keep you posted on the progress of this important bill.

**LACERA
Outreach
Workshops**

LACERA offers a variety of Outreach Workshops to suit the needs of active members. Each workshop is designed to help you plan your financial future. So whether you're already thinking about retirement or have a way to go, take a moment to review the workshops below. And remember: The key to a great retirement is planning for it ahead of time!

New Member

Workshop.....

New Member Workshops are delivered to several departments on a routine basis, providing new hires with an overview of the retirement plans. We discuss how to make a retirement plan choice that will fit the needs of each employee. New Member Workshops are provided to Safety and General members. New Member Workshops are scheduled at LACERA on Wednesday afternoons at 3:00 p.m. Please call 626-564-6000 ext. 3372 for reservations.

Pre-Retirement Planning Workshops.....

We suggest that you attend a pre-retirement workshop three to five years before your intended retirement date. This will also give you time to purchase any eligible service prior to membership. Planning well in advance will also allow you time to get your personal affairs in order for a smooth transition into retirement. If you visit LACERA's Member Services Office, we will help you choose the most advantageous retirement dates and provide you with personalized retirement allowance estimates based on your completed years of service and age at retirement.

You should also attend a second LACERA Pre-Retirement Workshop a year before your planned retirement date in order to fine tune your plans and take care of any additional retirement matters you may have.

Financial Counseling Workshops.....

These workshops are provided by Great-West representatives. They will help you review the various payment options available to participants in the Deferred Compensation Plan and 401(k) Savings Plan. You should view these plans as ways to improve your retirement picture.

Personal Financial Planning Workshops.....

These workshops are provided by representatives from The AXA Financial Group.

Deathbed Counseling Sessions.....

This is a service provided to terminally ill members and their families, to assist them in making retirement decisions. Since members requiring this type of guidance are generally not able to visit the LACERA office, we send counselors to the home or hospital to provide assistance and answer questions.

You may schedule attendance for a workshop at the LACERA Office by calling 800-786-6464. Reservations for all workshops are required due to high attendance.

If you'd like to arrange for a job site workshop presentation at your place of employment, speak with your departmental management staff or Personnel Office. They'll schedule an appropriate time and meeting room for the presentation. The only requirement is that you have 10 or more for the workshop. Just call LACERA at 818-564-6000 ext. 3372 or 3384, and we'll take care of the rest.

Helping the Patient by Helping the Caregiver

As the ranks of people past middle age swell, more adults than ever before are caring for elderly loved ones. Twenty-two million Americans—one in four households—provide assistance for older relatives, friends, or neighbors. Nearly half receive absolutely no help with their caregiving responsibilities. Adding to this burden, many caregivers have health needs of their own. Such heavy burdens can cause stress that may worsen these existing health problems or trigger new ones. And when the caregiver suffers, so does the patient. Fortunately, easing the strain of caregiving can improve the health and quality of life of both parties.

Emotional and Physical Costs

Studies show that caregivers can suffer from depression, insomnia, anxiety, or stress at least three times more often than non-caregivers. And sleep deprivation and depression can lead to fatigue, lethargy, headaches, and increased vulnerability to illness. Furthermore, all of these problems—particularly fatigue and stress—can weaken the immune system. As immune function declines, the incidence of infection and other illnesses rises.

The Importance of Treatment

With so much at stake, attending to the health care needs of caregivers should always be a high priority. It's important to be especially alert for the symptoms of depression. These include constant worry, inability to concentrate, trouble sleeping, fatigue, changes in appetite, and loss of interest in usual activities. Persistent feelings of anger, irritability, sadness, hopelessness, worthlessness, and guilt may also indicate a problem. Whether or not you are a caregiver, if you experience two or more of these symptoms for more than a week, seek help from your doctor, therapist, or counselor. If you are a caregiver, your patient will benefit, too. A study of cancer patients receiving chemotherapy found that their level of depression was directly related to the degree of their caregiver's depression.

Taking time to socialize and do the things you enjoy will help you relax—spending time with friends is a highly effective stress buster. In addition, don't try to accomplish too much at one time or expect to get everything done on your own. The responsibility of caregiving for someone who is frail or seriously ill requires enormous time and effort. Enlist the aid of friends, family, and health care professionals before you get overwhelmed.

Getting the Help You Need

If you are caring for a parent in addition to working full-time, pay attention to the signals your body is sending you. If you feel like you can't do it all on your own, get help. And if you have a parent who is a full-time caregiver for a grandparent, try to be sensitive to his or her needs. You can help relieve your parent's burden by offering financial or emotional support. Sometimes the simple act of listening can be a tremendous relief to a caregiver under stress.

Unexpected Rewards

Caregivers whose own health care needs are met and who get the support they need often experience positive emotions, including pride in their ability to meet caregiving challenges, and increased self-esteem. In addition, many caregivers build an improved relationship with the patient. "Opportunities for affection and communication often arise when they are least expected—and the patient is frequently the source," said psychiatrist and Health After 50 board member Dr. Peter Rabins.

For More Information

- Alzheimer's Association - Chicago, IL; 800-272-3900; www.alz.org
- National Family Caregivers Association - Kensington, MD; 800-896-3650; www.nfcacares.org
- American Association of Retired Persons - Washington, D.C.; 800-424-3410; www.aarp.org

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Plan E Lawsuit Update.....

In January of this year, a ruling was made in the lawsuit brought against the County and LACERA by Plan E members, that the action could not be pursued in a "representative capacity." The judge in the case, John P. Shook, did state however, that individual plaintiffs would be free to pursue the matter in court individually.

The attorneys for CEFRRP (County Employees for Fair Retirement Plans) have appealed Judge Shook's ruling in an effort to allow the class-action lawsuit to be filed. This appeal is still pending, and we will report any further developments in future P.S. issues.

Safety Member Elections.....

This summer, Safety members will be voting for representatives on the Board of Retirement and the Board of Investments. Each elected member will serve a three-year term, beginning in January 2002. The candidates statements were available for inspection at the office of the County Registrar Recorder from May 8-16, and the random drawing for order of appearance on the ballot took place on May 11. At that time, all eligible candidates were certified, and the Official Ballots were prepared. From June 1-6, the ballot materials were gathered for mailing, and should be arriving in your mailbox any day now.

Take this opportunity to vote and make a difference at LACERA, and make sure you get your ballots in by July 10! Once the votes have been tallied by the County Registrar Recorder, we'll announce the newest members on the Board of Retirement and Board of Investments. Good luck to all the candidates!

**LACERA's
Security
Policies For
Your
Protection**

From the Executive Desk

Marsha D. Richter, CEO, LACERA

The Computer Age is upon us. With the invention of cyberspace technology and high-tech computer systems, much of our personal information is now stored electronically. From Social Security numbers to e-mail addresses, there's no escaping the fact that our identities have been boiled down to numbers, dashes, and blips on the screen.

LACERA has many security policies in place to insure that all of the personal information we collect from you is protected, and we are always striving to keep our security measures up to date and impenetrable. I want to take this opportunity to explain some of the recent steps LACERA has taken to insure and protect your privacy:

Your Address Stays with Us

Many of you have probably experienced the deluge of e-junk mail that begins arriving the moment you register on a web site. This happens because unscrupulous sites buy and sell e-mail addresses and personal data without a care for the people on their lists. Credit card companies and banks may also participate in this type of information exchange, resulting in more and more targeted junk mail in your mailbox. LACERA has a policy that prohibits this kind of behavior. We will never sell or trade your address, social security number, or any other member information. That is my pledge to you. You can be sure that this confidential information is securely protected and will stay that way.

Our retirees, for example, receive literature in the mail from AFSME, RELAC, and 660 Seniors, and have asked if LACERA shared our address list with them. We would never give a member's address to these or any organization, however we do want to provide you with information about services or programs that may benefit the membership. In accordance with our privacy policy, the Board of Retirement determines what organizations fall into this category, and authorizes LACERA to distribute literature to you on their behalf. Once the Board has decided what literature will be distributed, these organizations give the material to LACERA and we send it out using our own mailing list. This way your address remains confidential.

Why LACERA Opposes AB 1289

This act is known as the "Californians' Right To Privacy Act," and we do not support its enactment as it is written. If it became law, this bill would prohibit LACERA from 1) using a Social Security number to identify a new member, commencing in January 1, 2003, and 2) using a Social Security number to identify any member, commencing January 1, 2005.

The reason LACERA opposes this bill is because it would create a major administrative obstacle for LACERA, as our entire member information system is designed to track members based on Social Security numbers. This bill would, in effect, necessitate that LACERA rebuild its entire systems infrastructure from the ground up and reassign new identification numbers to every member of the association. Because of the prohibitive cost and amount of time such a change would take, LACERA would only support the enactment of this bill if it were amended to exempt public health and welfare programs and public retirement programs.

LACERA has always put our members' security at the forefront of our programs, systems, and policies. AB 1289 would not contribute to any greater security or confidentiality, and would be prohibitively expensive to enact.

Prevent Identity Fraud

Identity fraud deterrence has become more and more important with each passing year. The Los Angeles Sheriff's Forgery/Fraud Detail has provided LACERA with a list of preventative measures you can take to protect yourself and your family from identity theft

- Purchase a shredder or tear up unwanted mail into small pieces.
 - Limit information you provide over the phone.
 - Do not carry paperwork in wallets or purses that may contain personal information, such as social security number, mother's maiden name, etc.
 - If companies ask for your social security number, ask them how it will be used and stored.
 - Do not place outgoing mail in the mailbox in front of your home—take it to the Post Office.
- It is not uncommon for identity thieves to steal checks from your mail, "wash" them to remove all the information except your signature, and then make the checks out to themselves.

In the event that you do become a victim of this type of crime, it is important to act quickly and assertively to minimize the damage. Call credit bureaus and creditors immediately to notify them of your situation, and cancel credit cards and bank accounts that may be affected.