U.S. Department of Energy
Plain Writing Act Compliance Report
April 15, 2023

I. Introduction

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) views the implementation of the Plain Writing Act as an important initiative that helps the Department share relevant information clearly, concisely, and informatively. The areas referenced in this report summarize some of our successes as we continue to emphasize writing in Plain Language.

II. DOE Plain Language Officials

A. Ingrid Kolb, Director of the Office of Management, Senior Agency Official Responsible for Plain Writing

B. Michael Coogan, Office of the Executive Secretariat, Plain Language Point-of-Contact

III. Examples of Agency Website Communications Available in a Format Consistent with the Plain Language Guidelines

A. *Office of Public Affairs*. The Office of Public Affairs manages DOE's public website – Energy.gov. The office has consolidated nearly 70 of DOE's staff and Program Offices from separate websites onto Energy.gov. This consolidation allows visitors to enter a search term and find their information on Energy.gov; previously, relevant information was scattered across many stand-alone DOE program and office websites not searchable from Energy.gov.

Energy.gov represents the Office of Public Affairs' commitment to principles of open government and Plain Language in several ways, including:

- *News, Blogs, and Articles*. The blog section on Energy.gov highlights timely content featuring many exciting innovations across DOE, from Program Offices to the National Laboratories. Energy.gov blogs and articles provide Plain Language summaries of complex scientific processes and discoveries in a conversational style for the public. Writers develop interactive content, such as timelines and quizzes, to explain topical energy concepts to the public. Press releases and statements from DOE leadership are written with Plain Language principles and posted to the Energy.gov newsroom.

- *Training.* Contributors to Energy.gov are encouraged to follow the principles of Plain Language in the webpages they maintain. They receive content guidelines and training on using Plain Language and following web best practices for making content accessible. In addition, Energy.gov offers blog writing and social media guidance to help offices develop easy-to-understand content.

- *Accessibility.* The Office of Public Affairs helped evaluate and implement a Section 508 tool called SiteImprove. This tool helps Energy.gov content owners identify broken links, misspellings, grammatical errors, and other accessibility/usability issues.

- *Google Analytics and Google Webmaster Tools.* The Office of Public Affairs provides Google Analytics training to other DOE offices. This training helps content owners understand important metrics, such as website visitor trends, behavior, and keyword searches within the internal website and external search engines such as Google. Offices use these metrics to guide their digital strategy and ensure content is reaching target audiences. Using Google Webmaster Tools and Google Analytics, the Office of Public Affairs has found most user search queries consist of terms that are simple and in Plain Language.

- *Podcast.* DOE's podcast, Direct Current – which the Office of Public Affairs manages – shares engaging, conversational stories about how DOE and the National Laboratories are making a positive difference for millions of Americans. Direct Current launched a new series this year called "People Powered" to showcase clean energy workers. Direct Current's format is similar to National Public Radio, which hailed it as "more ambitious" than other government podcasts. To date, DOE has aired 50 episodes each with corresponding transcripts and supplemental content, including blogs and videos.

- *Social Media.* The Office of Public Affairs uses Plain Language on social media, converting complex, scientific information into easy-to-understand, bite-sized messages. Additionally, the Office provides style and editorial guidance to other Department of Energy Program Offices and national laboratories to encourage using Plain Language for all social content.

  The Office of Public Affairs manages several agency-level social media platforms, including:

ACCOUNT	FOLLOWERS
Energy Twitter	825,700
Energy LinkedIn	201,800
Energy Facebook	154,000
Energy Instagram	145,000
SecGranholm Twitter	123,700
Energy YouTube	58,900
EnergyPress Twitter	25,300
SecGranholm Instagram	20,600
SecGranholm Facebook	13,000

- *Video.* The Office of Public Affairs produces video content summarizing the Secretary of Energy's trips and outreach, major announcements, and public engagement. The team is focused on short video summaries that accompany longer segments to further distill and clarify information for public audiences.

- *Newsletter.* The Office of Public Affairs maintains a Plain Language newsletter, "The Current," for DOE-wide announcements and updates to keep the public informed of DOE activities. This email subscription newsletter informs homeowners, renters, small business owners, and the public on how to access the benefits of clean energy and ways to save on energy costs.

- *Language.* The Office of Public Affairs is leading the charge across DOE to eliminate words like "minority" to create a more inclusive workforce. DOE is revolutionizing how we use language about diversity, equity, and inclusion in our communications, such as blog posts, website, press releases, public remarks, and social media content. DOE's Office of Science incorporated this guidance into its internal style guide.

B. *U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA)*. EIA staff developed and offered an in-house writing curriculum – a series of eight writing courses aptly named *Write Right.* In 2022, EIA trained 68 Federal employees and contractors under *Write Right.* Employees who attend these courses improve their Plain Language skills – punctuation, grammar, proofreading, and conciseness – and learn more about common writing mistakes and how to plan and revise their work. Each course is customized with EIA-relevant hands-on writing activities and EIA writing samples and focused on areas where writers and their managers need to improve.

In 2022, EIA offered two virtual 90-minute courses in the *Write Right* curriculum called "Policy Neutrality at EIA." The course topics include:

— Define what policy neutral means
— Explain how policy neutral is integral to EIA's mission
— Show trade press examples of non-policy neutral language
— Explain where writers run the greatest risks
— Provide sample list of words to avoid and their substitutions
— Practice identifying non-neutral language in small groups

The *Write Right* curriculum is successful because EIA has made a serious commitment – in time, money, and enthusiasm – to helping staff write more effectively. As one senior manager said, "We've definitely sent a signal that the agency is taking writing quite seriously and considers it a top priority."

EIA has new writing and editing classes planned in 2023 that place more emphasis on (1) scientific-style writing, and (2) giving writers more flexibility to use pronouns and other Plain Language principles.

In 2022, EIA leadership tasked the *Write Right* program manager to develop a series of classes focusing on areas where EIA writers can strengthen their skills. During the year, EIA:

- Developed a five-part course called *The EIA Writers Series*
- Developed a marketing strategy that included
  — Emails to all employees from the Write Right program manager and followup emails from the EIA Administrator encouraging employees to attend
  — News stories about the new series on the employee intranet
- Obtained EIA leadership approval for the curriculum
- Began marketing the series to EIA employees

This new series will roll out in 2023.

In 2022, EIA updated its *EIA Writing Style Guide*, focusing more specifically on tools writers need to convey highly technical information so the public can understand and use it.

From its nearly 70 reports published in 2022 on energy topics, EIA used Plain Language principles consistently throughout all web content, including its two annual flagship reports – the *Annual Energy Outlook and International Energy Outlook* – as well as its monthly *Short-Term Energy Outlook* and daily *Today in Energy.* The *Short-Term Energy Outlook* includes two important supplements in the spring and winter: The *Summer Fuels Outlook* and the *Winter Fuels Outlook*. The winter supplement forecasts the heating fuel costs in the winter, important for consumers who use space heating in the winter. The summer supplement primarily discusses gasoline costs as it relates to summer-month fuel requirements.

In 2022, EIA released preliminary estimates from its *Residential Energy Consumption Survey* on many topics, including residential lighting, electronics, appliances, fuel use, and air conditioning. The survey also measures how many U.S. households had difficulty paying energy bills, kept their home at an unsafe temperature because of energy cost concern, or both. Conducted every five years, this release of the *Residential Energy Consumption Survey* is the first time EIA included data for all 50 states and the District of Columbia as well as information on smart home devices and electric vehicles. All of this information was released using Plain Language principles.

Last year EIA released preliminary consumption and expenditures estimates from its *Commercial Buildings Energy Consumption Survey*, which also occurs once every five years. The newly released data tables provide preliminary energy consumption, expenditure, and intensity information for major fuels, including electricity and natural gas, at the national and census-region levels. EIA prepared a flipbook that shows highlights from the preliminary data.

All of the EIA publications listed above contain related infographics and social media campaigns that highlight notable and meaningful energy and forecasting data for visitors in simple and clear terms.

EIA's YouTube channel features how-to videos in Plain Language about EIA surveys and forms, clips in Plain Language on featured topics, informational videos on data tools and how to use them, webinars on pressing energy issues, and product launch events with private sector partners, such as the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

EIA's website contains educational materials reflecting Plain Language principles, including:

- *Today in Energy.* These short articles use Plain Language along with graphics, photos, maps, and animations to educate the public on timely energy issues and topics. Every business day, EIA provides bite-sized pieces of information that

readers can use in business, government, schools, and their personal lives. Energy experts explain topical data, reports, issues, and trends to build the public's understanding of energy issues.

- *Energy Kids.* This student-friendly website provides opportunities – through information and activities – to learn about energy while improving research and reading skills. The teacher guide provides activities for teachers who use Energy Kids as a resource to teach students about energy in a fun and interactive way.

- *Energy Explained.* This extensive resource describes the different sources and uses of energy in understandable, everyday language. EIA updated more than 178 Energy Explained pages in 2022.

- *Frequently Asked Questions.* This EIA resource provides answers in Plain Language to sometimes complicated questions about energy asked by the public and other stakeholders through EIA's website, Twitter, and Facebook. EIA frequently updates the FAQ page to include the most current information and most popular inquiries. EIA updated all 99 FAQs in 2022.

- *Glossary.* Because EIA's content can be very technical, EIA maintains an extensive glossary of terms that EIA authors can use to hyperlink technical terms for readers who want more detailed explanations. The glossary is also a searchable tool web users can easily find on EIA.gov.

EIA maintains several data tools to make browsing EIA data interactive and easy for users. In 2022, EIA released Version 2 of its application programming interface. This version allows users to build their own visualizations and analyses by downloading and mixing EIA data to fit their needs. New features of Version 2 include a fully discoverable data tree; more facet, filter, and sort controls; enhanced security; and many additional data collections.

As several extreme weather events affect large areas of the country, EIA publishes real time and retrospective analysis of these energy disruptions in easy-to-understand formats for the public. In 2022, EIA helped customers track the impacts of how severe weather disrupted energy infrastructure and markets:

- Before Hurricane Ian hit western Florida on September 22, 2022, EIA published an article in *This Week in Petroleum* about the storm's potential impact on gasoline supply and later published a *Today in Energy* article providing additional information after the storm.

- EIA analyzed how an extreme heat wave in California during the week of September 4, 2022 changed both the electricity generation mix (such as solar, natural gas, fuel, hydrogen, battery backup, and renewables) and the costs of these different types of power. This gave power providers information they

needed to meet electricity demand while asking Californians to reduce consumption, thereby lowering demand.

- On June 8, a fire at the LNG natural gas liquefaction plant in Freeport on South Texas' Gulf Coast led to the full shutdown of the facility. In a *Today in Energy* article, EIA estimated how the shutdown would reduce total U.S. liquefied natural gas export capacity. EIA also explored the effects of the resulting decline in export capacity on the U.S. benchmark natural gas price.

In response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the resulting uncertainty in energy markets, EIA frequently updated its analysis of market changes in crude oil prices and demand, tanker transportation rates, and U.S. petroleum imports, among other factors. In light of these sudden geo-political shifts affecting U.S. household energy costs, EIA kept the public informed about how these changes would affect them. In several editions of its *Short-Term Energy Outlook*, EIA incorporated additional uncertainty caused by international responses to the current geopolitical climate. EIA monitored market dynamics in the energy sector and published updated information on its website and social media to support a fuller understanding of the evolving situation.

EIA uses social media to promote *Today in Energy* stories and newly published reports and analyses, and is active on Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, LinkedIn, and YouTube. EIA social media statistics from April 2022 to March 2023:

ACCOUNT	FOLLOWERS
EIA Twitter	177,700
EIA Facebook	44,000
EIA LinkedIn	20,417
EIA Twitter (Administrator)	4,460

EIA data show the audience for these social platforms is significantly larger than the number of followers.

EIA uses social media to connect consumers with useful EIA tools, such as the Hourly Electric Grid Monitor, the Status of U.S. Nuclear Outages page, and the Flood Vulnerability Assessment Map.

EIA continues to enhance its ability to respond to electricity emergencies with the Energy Disruptions web page, hurricane status reports, and *Today in Energy* articles that provide information on a storm's potential to disrupt the energy system and analyses of the resulting impacts after landfall.

C. *Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE)*. EERE manages its popular main website along with its consumer favorites – EnergySaver.gov and the Alternative Fuel Data Center's fuel station locator. After the Energy.gov home page, EERE's "how to" content rounded out the top five most visited pages on Energy.gov in 2022:

> — Homeowner's Guide to the Federal Tax Credit for Solar Photovoltaics
> — How Do Wind Turbines Work?
> — How Does Solar Work?
> — Advantages and Challenges of Wind Energy

EERE websites contain several features reflecting Plain Language guidelines, including:

- EERE's Energy Saver site provides practical, easy-to-understand consumer advice for saving energy. Blog posts are written in Plain Language and amplify the information on the site's static pages, which have been updated to make the content more approachable. More complex topics were moved to other parts of the EERE site where versed stakeholders would benefit from them. Energy Saver has also developed more interactive material to engage the public and more easily explain energy conservation strategies in a straight-forward manner. The Energy Efficient House Tour is one such example. Energy Saver has also redesigned its web site for easier navigation and made it easier for the pubic to search its section titles.

- *EERE Success Stories.* The stories are short features spotlighting the positive impact of EERE's work with businesses, industry partners, universities, research labs, and other entities. These stories are consolidated into an interactive map showing EERE Success Stories across the United States.

- *Clean Energy in Action Blog.* This blog discusses clean energy technologies in easy-to-understand language. Approachable topics, such as myth busting common misconceptions, highlighting changes to energy policy, summarizing research findings, and celebrating clean energy champions, allow EERE to engage the public in a conversational manner.

- *How Do Wind Turbines Work?* This popular EERE web page provides an easy-to-understand explanation of how wind turbines operate and defines technical terms in Plain Language. The initial success of this web page inspired other EERE web pages to follow suit, including the page How Does Solar Work?

- Social Media Posts. EERE manages multiple social media accounts and blogs that reach audiences such students, job seekers, and industry representatives in shared online communities. In 2022, EERE's main social media accounts gained about 37,000 new followers, due in part to their simplified and conversational-style language and engaging graphics and photos.

ACCOUNT	FOLLOWERS
EERE Facebook	172,000
Solar Decathlon Facebook	23,322
EERE LinkedIn	20,706
Solar Decathlon Twitter	18,200
EERE Twitter	16,100

- Infographics. EERE condenses highly technical information about clean energy topics into simple infographics used for multiple purposes, including social media posts, reports, and web pages.

- EERE's Communication Standards website. This page includes guidelines for content writers and editors and a section explaining the Plain Writing Act and its requirements. The Communication Standards section also includes EERE's style guide and guidelines to ensure content is 508 compliant and accessible to those with disabilities.

- EERE provides a large assortment of Adobe InDesign and Microsoft PowerPoint templates for internal users to develop high-quality printed materials and presentations. The InDesign templates are in a variety of formats, including fact sheets, scientific and technical reports, pamphlets, and handouts. These templates include a pink-colored layer, which may be toggled on and off, that provides guidance on writing, including Plain Language references.

- The EERE Online Publications Library. This library includes search terms and allows searches by category that are simple and easy to use to find publications by topic. Special emphasis makes certain search terms relevant and meaningful.

EERE participates in the DOE Web Council, which meets monthly to address common issues, including Plain Writing Act compliance.

EERE's Product Governance Team, which includes subject matter experts from EERE Technology and Program Offices, as well as Department of Energy national laboratories, reviews EERE-branded print products to ensure they adhere to EERE's branding and formatting policies and are easy to understand. Digital versions of all approved printed materials are in EERE's Online Publications Library for easy public access.

EERE has developed fact sheets to easily explain the issues surrounding the submission of scientific and technical information (STI), including what STI materials are and how to submit them for paper records management and storage.

Team leads for EERE's public correspondence and websites encourage writers of public correspondence and web content throughout EERE to take DOE's Plain Language training courses. Team leads forward opportunities for Plain Language training to EERE web coordinators, including an opportunity through Digital.gov and plainlanguage.gov entitled, "Plain Language: Accessibility for Content."

To address common queries from the public, the public correspondence team developed Plain Language responses that are consistent, follow best practices, and are aligned with Federal policy. These prewritten replies expedite DOE's responses to consumers.

D. *National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA).* The NNSA is a semi-autonomous agency within the Department of Energy, responsible for enhancing national security through the military application of nuclear science. NNSA maintains multiple websites that follow Plain Language principles. NNSA's primary website – Energy.gov/nnsa – is regularly updated with press releases, articles, infographics, animations and videos, newsletters, fact sheets, and other documents. This information highlights NNSA's mission and activities, including areas such as stockpile stewardship and nuclear nonproliferation. The website also provides information on NNSA careers and structure, and links to NNSA's social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram, and Flickr).

NNSA also maintains a Directives website that serves as a content and document management system for policies and procedures. This public website allows users to access and organize the Department's Technical Standards and other information simply and quickly.

NNSA's websites reflect Plain Language principles that give the public a better understanding of NNSA's programs, such as:

- Prevent, Counter, and Respond – A Strategic Plan to Reduce Global Nuclear Threats. This report describes NNSA's planning and program activities on U.S.

national security and advance global nuclear security. The report uses Plain Language principles to clearly define and describe its missions to prevent, counter, and respond to the threats of nuclear proliferation and terrorism.

- Stockpile Stewardship and Management Plan. This report describes NNSA's efforts to maintain and modernize scientific tools, capabilities, and infrastructure to ensure the success of NNSA's nuclear weapons mission.

- Fact sheets. NNSA produces numerous fact sheets that outline its weapon life extension programs, important missions, other important public-facing documents, and material for the media. The fact sheets follow Plain Language principles.

- Top 10. This page provides users with the ten most frequently accessed policies and directives from the preceding month.

E. *Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO)*. Information and technology help DOE meet its mission in energy, science, and nuclear security. The OCIO's programs span all these areas.

The OCIO also maintains the Department's internal Powerpedia wiki, which has a section educating staff on how to use Plain Language (see below, section V, part B). The OCIO uses Plain Language to convey technical and operational concepts.

The OCIO also partners with the Office of Public Affairs and the DOE Web Council to regularly bring Plain Language concepts to web content managers across the agency.

IV. Examples of Other Agency Communications Consistent with the Plain Language Guidelines

Office of the Executive Secretariat. The Office of the Executive Secretariat oversees Secretarial correspondence and most DOE Congressional Reports. The office provides DOE guidance on these documents consistent with the Plain Writing Act and reviews documents for consistency with the Act's guidelines.

V. Informing Agency Staff of the Plain Writing Act's Requirements

A. DOE's website contains links to the agency's current and previous *Plain Writing Act Compliance Reports*.

B. The Department's internal wiki – Powerpedia [1] – has a Plain Language page. Through the wiki, DOE lists resources and information, including:

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[1] Accessible only to Department of Energy employees and contractors

- Embedded YouTube videos from the Plain Language Action Information Network that highlight best practices for clear writing.
- Training schedules for Plain Language classes.
- Guidelines and links for writing in Plain Language.
- Before and after Plain Language examples.

VI. Training

Plain Language training has been a staple at DOE since 2011. Initially directed toward its headquarters personnel in the District and Germantown, Maryland, training for employees and contractors expanded to the Department's laboratories and field offices across the country via video conferencing. Plain Language training expanded further when laboratories and field offices requested in-person instruction. During public health concerns of the past three years, some training transitioned to virtual. All classes are led by an in-house agency instructor.

DOE personnel have fully embraced Plain Language training. The Department holds open classes for employees and contractors in groups of 20-30, as well as DOE Program Offices when they request training as a group.

The Plain Language training specifics from April 2022 to March 2023:

	Classes	Participants
In-Person DC Headquarters (Forrestal Building)*	2	24
In-Person Germantown, Maryland	1	9
Virtual Instruction for DOE Personnel Nationwide	4	116
Virtual Instruction Requested Specifically by DOE Program Offices**	4	99
In-Person Instruction at the Hanford site, Richland, WA	1	30
In-Person Instruction at the Pacific Northwest Nat. Lab, Richland, WA	1	22
TOTAL	**13**	**300**

*   *Includes one class requested by the Office of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*

**   *One class was requested by Fellows at the National Nuclear Security Administration; one class was requested by the Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy's Work Management Office; and two classes were requested by the Office of Legacy Management*

At both its DC headquarters and Germantown facility, the Department promotes Plain Language training and generates awareness to all employees and contractors through the

monthly electronic Secretary's newsletter and flyers at key locations in the buildings. The DC Headquarters also promotes the classes through an in-house television broadcasting system. At Department sites across the country, points-of-contact promote Plain Language training.

DOE's Plain Language classes provide tools that allow writers to present information more clearly, including:

- Focusing on the reader when you write

- Writing not what you want to say, but what the reader needs to know

- Using active voice and not passive voice, and how to distinguish between the two

- Limiting jargon and acronyms

- Using pronouns and everyday words

- Shortening sentences and paragraphs

- Identifying the audience

- Using lists (bullets, numbers, letters) and tables instead of long-form paragraphs

- Making your document easier to read, allowing readers to more easily absorb the information

VII. Ongoing Compliance/Sustaining Change

A. All DOE employees and contractors are encouraged to incorporate Plain Language principles in their writing. Some Program Offices have developed style guides that support Plain Language concepts (The Energy Information Administration's [EIA] *Writing Style Guide* is one example). Some offices, such as the Office of the Chief Information Officer and EIA, also integrate Plain Language concepts into their document review process.

The Office of the Executive Secretariat incorporates Plain Language standards in its review of DOE documents and external correspondence and works with Program Offices to emphasize Plain Language principles.

B. The Department's Powerpedia internal wiki has an Acronyms List that identifies Department-related acronyms for readers and provides the acronym's description.

C. Plain Language training is ongoing for DC headquarters, Germantown, and field facilities.

VIII. DOE Plain Language Websites/Links

A. DOE's Plain Language website

B. The Plain Language page on Powerpedia, DOE's internal wiki site

C. DOE's link on its internal Plain Language website to Federal Plain Language Guidelines

D. DOE's link on its Plain Language website to the Plain Language Action Information Network

E. The Energy Information Administration's Writing Style Guide and its one-page tip sheet

IX. Customer Satisfaction Evaluation after Experiencing Plain Language Communications

The Department continues to monitor and optimize how Energy.gov is serving consumers, businesses, governments, educators, researchers, and the public. As DOE places increasing emphasis on mobile-friendly online content, Plain Language principles become more critical in meeting the agency's communications needs.

A. The Office of Public Affairs continuously updates the Energy.gov homepage and Energy 101 content to be responsive to user interest.

B. In 2022, after holding an all-employee meeting to gather feedback and suggestions, the Energy Information Administration (EIA) working group met and decided on a number of updates to its *Writing Style Guide* based on its writers' experiences and best practices in Plain Language and the energy trade press. The new focus of the style guide is creating reader-centric content in a conversational, relevant voice that aligns with energy trade press. EIA continues to update the guide annually based on employee feedback and style guide workgroup approval.

EIA's style guide is its central document for Plain Language, and employees use the guide for help and advice on the EIA writing style, grammar tips, and writing clearly. Many EIA employees also post the *Writing Style Guide's* tip sheet on their office walls and doors. EIA's style guide has won a ClearMark Award from the Center for Plain Language.

C. The attendance numbers for EIA's *Write Right* curriculum show that the courses are popular. Comments on the evaluation surveys indicate that participants found the training informative and useful.

EIA's annual web customer satisfaction survey conducted in August 2022 showed that 93 percent of 27,395 respondents indicated they were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the quality of the information on EIA's website. This survey also collects information on who is visiting the website and the information they are seeking.

Other EIA product-specific surveys collect information on how customers use a particular product, if the customer finds it useful, and how EIA can improve it.

D. A member of DOE's Plain Language Working Group served as a judge for the Center for Plain Language's *2022 Federal Plain Language Report Card,* making this the third consecutive year at least one member of the Working Group has served as a judge for the Report Card. The judges brought their expertise and knowledge of Plain Language principles to the judging process, while taking away from their experience greater insight on how Federal Government websites can use Plain Language to convey their messages more clearly to the public.

E. Another member of DOE's Plain Language Working Group, for the fourth consecutive year, served as a judge for the Center for Plain Language's *ClearMark Awards*, which showcases the best in Plain Language communication.