

any way in the investigation or prosecution of the proceeding or a factually related proceeding, and an employee of the Department who is involved or may be involved in the decisional process of a proceeding, except at a conference, hearing or review proceeding under these rules is improper and prohibited.

(b) *Request for information.* A request for information about the status of a proceeding without discussing issues or expressing points of view and inquiries with respect to procedural matters or an emergency request for an extension of time are not deemed ex parte communications. When practical all parties should be notified of any request for an extension of time. Communication between an applicant or recipient and the agency or the Secretary with respect to securing voluntary compliance with any requirement of subpart A of this part is not prohibited.

(c) *Un-sponsored written material.* Letters expressing views or urging action and other unsponsored written material regarding matters in issue in a proceeding will be placed in the correspondence section of the docket of the proceeding. Such are not deemed part of the evidence or record.

FORM, EXECUTION, FILING AND SERVICE  
OF DOCUMENTS

**§ 15.71 Form of documents to be filed.**

All copies of documents filed in a proceeding shall be dated, signed in ink, shall show the address and position or title of the signatory, and shall show the docket number and title of the proceeding on the front page.

**§ 15.72 Filing.**

All documents relating to a proceeding under this subpart shall be filed in an original and two copies of such document with the Office of the Hearing Clerk at Room 112, Administration Building, Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C., 20250, during regular business hours. Regular business hours are every Monday through Friday (legal holidays in the District of Columbia excepted) from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., eastern standard or daylight saving time, whichever is effective in the District of Columbia at the time.

**§ 15.73 Service.**

Service shall be made by the Hearing Clerk by personal delivery of one copy to each person to be served or by mailing by first-class mail, or air mail if more than 300 miles, properly addressed with postage prepaid. When a party or intervener has appeared by attorney or representative, service upon such attorney or representative will be deemed proper service. The initial notice of hearing, opportunity to request a hearing, or notice setting a date for a hearing shall be by certified mail, return receipt requested.

**§ 15.74 Date of service.**

The date of service shall be the day when the matter is deposited in the U.S. mail or is delivered in person, except that the date of service of the initial notice a hearing or notice of opportunity to request a hearing or notice setting a date for a hearing shall be the date of its delivery, or of its attempted delivery if delivery is refused.

INITIAL NOTICE AND RESPONSE

**§ 15.81 How proceedings are commenced.**

Proceedings are commenced by mailing a notice to an applicant or recipient of alleged noncompliance with the Act and the Secretary's regulations thereunder. The notice will be signed by the interested agency head or by the Secretary and shall be filed with the hearing clerk for proper service by the hearing clerk according to the rules of this subpart. The notice shall include either a notice of hearing or notice of opportunity to request a hearing as determined by the Secretary and shall comply with the requirements of § 15.9(a).

**§ 15.82 Notice of hearing and response thereto.**

A notice of hearing shall fix a date not less than 30 days from the date of service of the notice of a hearing on matters alleged in the notice. If the applicant or recipient does not desire a hearing, he should so state in writing, in which case the applicant or recipient shall have the right to submit written information and argument for the