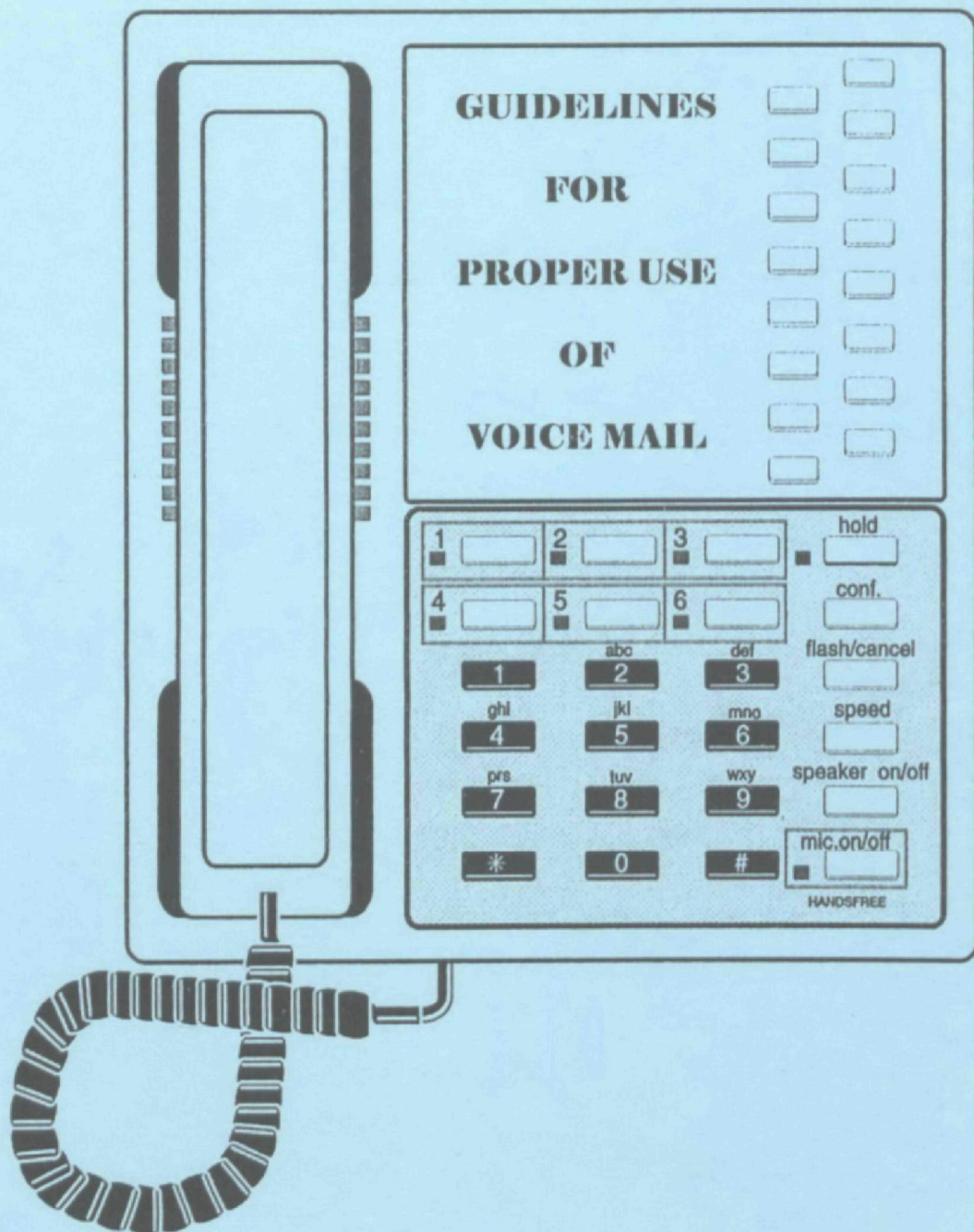


United States
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**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460**

**OFFICE OF
ADMINISTRATION
AND RESOURCES
MANAGEMENT**

Dear Colleague:

Much of the Agency's business takes place over the telephone. The telephone is one of the best tools available to respond to our customers' needs and fulfill our environmental mission. Thus, every day, each of us has the opportunity to strengthen public trust in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency by responding promptly, respectfully and helpfully to phone calls.

The use of the voice mail is an excellent way to strengthen interactions with our customers. When using voice mail, I urge that you demonstrate professionalism, courtesy, and a "can-do" attitude both to our internal and external customers.

The following guidelines are designed to assist you in practicing these principles and to promote consistent quality of voice mail usage across the Agency. Thank you for your cooperation in this important customer service initiative.


Romulo L. Diaz, Jr.
Assistant Administrator

Voice mail is the first introduction most callers have with Environmental Protection Agency employees.

Voice mail has improved our ability to communicate with Regional offices in different time zones and is now considered an essential tool in today's business world.

Personal greetings should be courteous, professional, and helpful. This guide highlights the areas that are most susceptible to criticism.

COURTESY

Voice mail is more effective when a few rules of common courtesy are followed. Always answer the phone when you are free to do so. Don't "hide behind" voice mail by letting calls automatically roll to your voice mailbox. Return calls within a couple of hours.

PERSONAL GREETINGS

Encourage callers to leave a detailed message. Studies show that a greeting that includes the following components will help callers feel more comfortable.



CONTENT

Your voice mail greeting should include: your name, the name of your organization (acronyms can be confusing to an outside customer), your schedule or availability (e.g., whether you are in the office, in training, on sick leave, or on vacation), when you expect to return, an alternative source within the Agency for information during your absence, and an option to press zero only when there is an attendant to answer the phone. If you are an EPA contractor, you must identify yourself as such in your greeting.



REGULAR UPDATES

To maintain current information about your availability, you should update your personal greeting at least weekly, and preferably daily. Callers who reach a generic greeting (i.e., a greeting that does not indicate your availability) may not know if you will receive their messages. As a result, these callers must press zero to speak with an attendant to find out your availability.

While updating your personal greeting every day may seem awkward and time-consuming at first, you will soon discover that it can become a habit as easy as turning on your PC when you first arrive at your desk.



EXTENDED-ABSENCE GREETING

You should record an extended-absence greeting if you plan to be unavailable for a full day or an extended period of time. An informative extended-absence greeting should include the duration of your absence, as well as the name and telephone number of a co-worker who can handle your business calls during your absence.

DIAL-ZERO TARGETS

All EPA voice mailboxes are programmed to provide callers with the option to press zero, so that they can reach someone when you are not available. Callers become frustrated when no one comes on the line or are bounced into another voice mailbox. This practice is commonly known as "voice mail jail." Therefore, it is critical that the dial-zero attendant for your office be staffed during the Agency's normal business hours. Dial-zero targets should never forward to voice mail during normal business hours.

TRAINING

EPA offers voice mail training to the new user and the advanced user. The new user is required to receive EPA training prior to obtaining a password to access the voice mailbox. To find out more information on how to register for voice mail training, contact the EPA telecommunications support representative in your office.

For additional information about voice mail, call 202-260-7200 and ask to speak to a member of the Voice Processing Staff.