Post Allowance Update – August 2016

Post Allowance is the cost-of-living allowance (COLA), authorized under 5 U.S.C. 5924 to offset the difference between the cost of living at the post of assignment and the cost of living in Washington, D.C. (as determined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics).

For general questions about Post Allowance, please see Post Allowance FAQs at: <https://aoprals.state.gov/content.asp?content_id=166&menu_id=81>.

**Why is the Post Allowance survey being updated?**
The Post Allowance survey is periodically reviewed for relevancy. The last time the Office of Allowances performed this review was in 2008. Since then, changes in living patterns have made a number of the items surveyed out of date. For example, until this update the survey asked about the price of camera film and the cost of an international long distance call. Very few people still buy camera film and the rise of internet communications has almost eliminated the need to make international calls on a landline. Similarly, the survey was not capturing products and services that are frequently used overseas, such as non-dairy milk and dry cleaning for women’s clothing.

**When will the changes take effect?**
September 19, 2016

**How were the changes determined?**
The Office of Allowances set up an inter-agency COLA Working Group, which included, among others, representatives from State regional bureaus, DoD, and USAID. a, This working group gathered input from posts around the world, and the new survey represents feedback from overseas on most frequently purchased products consumption patterns of USG civilians posted abroad.

**What has changed?**
Items Being Added to the Retail Price Schedule Survey
Bacon
Ham
Yogurt, plain
Non-dairy Milk (e.g., Soy, Almond)
Oatmeal, instant
Butter
Whole Bean Coffee
K-Cups (coffee pods)
Olive Oil
Honey
Blueberries
Strawberries
Spinach (fresh)
Mixed Vegetables (frozen)
Women’s Dress
Women’s Dress Shoes
Tampons
Deodorant
Mouth Wash
Dry Clean Women’s Suit
Women’s Hair Color (Hair Services)
Coffee Brewing System
Blender
Monthly Fee for Mobile Phone
Allergy Medication
Cough Syrup
Digital Photo Printing (single print 4" x 6")
SD Card (32 GB, 64 GB)
Cable TV/Satellite TV
Veterinary Visit
Diesel
Pizza (fast food lunch)
Appetizer (Dinner)

Items Being Removed from the Retail Price Schedule Survey
Lettuce
Green Peas (frozen)
Women’s Permanent (Hair Services)
Blank data CDs R/W
Film Processing
Camera Film
Weekly News Magazine
International Long Distance Call
Medium Level Gasoline
Day Worker
Dessert (Lunch)
Soup (Dinner)
Salad (Dinner)

**What about posts in the process of preparing a survey?**Posts currently in the process of working on a Post Allowance survey have two choices:(1) If the survey is near completion, then post may submit it in the eAllowances system (http://eallowances.a.state.sbu/DefaultPost.aspx) before September 19, 2016. (2) Post may choose to wait until the new survey is available and then gather prices for the additional items. Please note that the eAllowances system will retain all survey information entered prior to September 19 for the items that are not changing. Items being removed will no longer appear in the survey after that date. If a post requires additional time to submit its survey or has any questions, please contact the Office of Allowances team responsible for your region:
Cassie Washington, Team Supervisor; Michelle E. Spinner, Team Leader — Africa (AF), Eastern Europe (E-EUR), Central Asia (CA), and Western Hemisphere (WHA)
Isam (Sam) Bebee, Team Supervisor; Bonita A. Davis, Team Leader — East Asia & Pacific (EAP), Western Europe (W-EUR), Near East (NE), and South Asia (SA)

**Is survey preparation training available?**Yes. FSI has two on-line courses to assist staff members who are collecting prices and preparing the Post Allowance survey. Those courses are:

• PA462 – eAllowances: Retail Price Schedules (Version 2)
• PA463 – Post Allowances: Retail Price Collecting (Version 2)
We urge anyone involved with preparing or reviewing the Post Allowance survey to take the PA462 training course before beginning work. We also urge anyone involved with price collection to take PA463.

**What else is planned?**Allowances is happy to announce a Price Collector app available for Department-issued BlackBerrys that allows the price collector to scan the survey items and upload them into the eAllowances system while at the store, reducing both errors and data entry time. What if your post doesn’t use BlackBerrys? The app will soon be available for the iPhone. If your post is at the beginning stage of preparing a survey and would like to help pilot the iPhone version, please contact eAllowancesHelp@state.gov.

In addition, the Office of Allowances is working with software developers to automate the Living Pattern Questionnaire. This endeavor is only at the beginning stages. Once finalized, it will greatly reduce the data entry burden for everyone at post.