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**MERIT SYSTEMS PROTECTION BOARD
EXPLAINS THE MEANING AND CONSEQUENCES OF
PROHIBITED PERSONNEL PRACTICES**

The prohibited personnel practices (PPPs) are a series of proscribed actions, codified at [5 U.S.C. § 2302\(b\)](#), the commission of which can lead to an official being reprimanded, suspended, demoted, fired, fined, and/or debarred from Federal employment. In the most recent report by the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB), [Prohibited Personnel Practices: Employee Perceptions](#), MSPB describes what each PPP means as a practical matter, how frequently Federal employees perceive each practice occurring, and the consequences for an agency when its employees believe that management is committing one or more PPPs.

Relying upon data from Merit Principles Surveys conducted between 1992 and 2010, the MSPB report explains that perceptions of many PPPs are at an 18-year low. However, the report also demonstrates that agencies should be vigilant to prevent the occurrence of PPPs, or even the perception that PPPs are taking place.

“An employee does not need to be personally affected by the outcome of a PPP to be affected by an official’s decision to commit a PPP,” Chairman Susan Tsui Grundmann explains. The MSPB’s survey data shows that the more PPPs that an employee perceives, the less likely the employee is to be engaged. According to Chairman Grundmann, “This report shows that when employees believe that their managers are basing personnel decisions on prohibited criteria, it has real consequences for the agency’s ability to have a productive and engaged workforce.”

The report reminds agencies to ensure that personnel decisions are based on the best information available and are merit-based. Being as transparent as possible about the process—both in advance and following a decision—can help dispel suspicions that improper motives played a role in the decision-making process. Chairman Grundmann believes that such openness may also dissuade officials from knowingly attempting to take an improper action. “Our goal with this report, and our other outreach activities regarding PPPs, is prevention through education,” she asserts.

This report is one in a series of reports that MSPB is undertaking under its studies authority to draw attention to the PPPs and merit system principles. In addition to this new report, and a report last year on whistleblower rights, MSPB currently is working on an update to its 1993 study of employee perceptions of barriers to blowing the whistle and a new study of employee perceptions related to the merit system principles. The MSPB studies are available at no cost on our website at www.mspb.gov/studies.

The [U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board](http://www.mspb.gov) (MSPB) is an independent, quasi-judicial agency that protects Federal merit systems and the rights of individuals within those systems. The MSPB also conducts studies of the civil service and other merit systems in the Executive Branch.