

# Employer Update



A PUBLICATION OF THE VIRGINIA RETIREMENT SYSTEM

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## In the News

### **myVRS: At Your Service**

*myVRS*, a new online, secure service for active and deferred members of the Virginia Retirement System (VRS), is now available on the VRS Web site. Since its launch in May, more than 4,000 members have created *myVRS* online accounts.

With *myVRS*, members can:

- Create retirement benefit estimates for a future retirement date using various scenarios for growth in AFC or purchase of prior service.
- View service and contributions, employment history and compensation history.
- Look up purchase of prior service information and basic group life insurance benefit for natural death.
- Set up a personal profile that includes their address and e-mail address, which they can update at any time.
- Check on the status of pending transactions such as applications for retirement or refunds.

“For the first time, members have direct access to their own information,” said Bob Schultze, VRS director. “Moreover, members can see online what our surveys indicate they want to see. Focus group participants examined a prototype and helped us refine the application further. This will be our platform for forthcoming online services to be made available to members, employers and retirees.”

You and your employees can find *myVRS* from the VRS Web site at [www.varetire.org](http://www.varetire.org). Select the “Member” tab and then “*myVRS* Login.” Or, just go to [www.varetire.org/myVRS](http://www.varetire.org/myVRS).

### **Staged promotional rollout planned**

“Our promotional plan calls for informing members about the new system in stages via their employers, beginning later this summer,” Bob said. “We’ll be using the summer as a period to monitor system performance, address usability issues and assess impact on our call center before promoting *myVRS* to the entire membership.”

Bob added: “Until then, I would ask employers not to make any widespread announcements to their employees, although I certainly encourage you to inform individual employees who come to you for retirement counseling that *myVRS* is available for their needs.”

VRS staff members are now developing employer kits to assist you in spreading the word among your employees. VRS also will communicate directly with members through the VRS Web site and the *Member Bulletin*.

Additional details and a timeline for distribution of employer kits will be published in future issues of *Employer Update*. Stay tuned!

### **Employer Representatives Provide Personalized Service**

Whether you need one-on-one assistance or want to participate in a group brainstorming session, the Employer Representative team is here to support your role as a VRS-participating employer.

“We have three employer representatives who specialize in issues related to state agencies, school divisions and participating local governments,” said Susan Keith, Employer Representative manager. “Their focus is on assisting individuals who interact with VRS and our third-party administrators.”

Your employer representative will visit you at your office or work with you to help resolve return-to-work issues, guide you through the process of having actuarial studies performed to join VRS or to enhance your current benefits, and keep you updated on legislation and contribution rates.

“By partnering with the employers, the representatives can get feedback on needs and listen to concerns regarding VRS products and services. We can meet with you in your office, at your convenience, to discuss a particular concern,” explains Susan. “Employer reps provide a ready resource for employers when they need to research a unique situation or get more detailed information than a quick phone conversation can provide. One of the main areas that we work in is with issues surrounding coverage and compliance with the *Code of Virginia*.”

VRS recently hosted a series of Employer Forums at locations throughout the state. Attendees at the forums learned of recent developments at VRS and heard about legislation, policy and current benefit issues. All attendees learned about new services from Minnesota Life, administrator of the group life insurance program, while those at the forums for state employers also heard representatives from UnumProvident and Aetna, third-party administrators for the Virginia Sickness and Disability Program and long-term care, speak of new developments.

The forums provide an excellent opportunity to network with your peers and to exchange information on mutual concerns. To inquire about forums in your area, express interest in hosting a forum, or request assistance for your agency, contact your employer representative:

Susan Keith, Program Manager: 804-344-3156  
Carolyn Newton, School Divisions: 804-344-3196  
Dennis Merrill, State Agencies: 804-697-6660  
Ben Howard, Political Subdivisions: 804-697-6686

At a recent Employer Forum, attendees were invited to participate in a brainstorming session, which focused on ways VRS can improve the *Employer Update* newsletter. A survey was distributed and results are being evaluated to determine how VRS can better meet your needs through this newsletter and other communications. VRS would like to express thanks to everyone who participated in the brainstorming sessions and completed the survey.

### **Minnesota Life Offers New E-mail Service for Employers**

While at an Employer Forum, Joe Chang, manager of the Richmond branch office of Minnesota Life, announced a new service for employers, automatic e-mail notification of life insurance changes. “Many VRS employers have expressed a desire for more on-line services, and providing e-mail notifications of decisions on optional life insurance is the latest innovation in our service for VRS employers,” he said.

You can begin receiving automatic e-mail notifications right away. Just send a request for the “Automatic Underwriting Snapshot” feature to Joe Chang. His e-mail address is [joseph.chang@minnesotalife.com](mailto:joseph.chang@minnesotalife.com).

Once activated, e-mail notifications will be scheduled for weekly Saturday deliveries. Each e-mail will advise whether there has been any optional life approval activity and the number of changes. For more detailed information about the changes, a link to LifeBenefitsExtra, Minnesota Life’s confidential Web site, will be included in the body of the automatic e-mail notification.

You may wish to work with your IT security staff in case spam filters need to be adjusted to accommodate it. Your security team may look for “LifeBenefitsExtra@minnesotalife.com” as the address of the sender on these automatic e-mails.

## **VRS Adopts Single Toll-Free Number**

Effective June 26, VRS adopted a single toll-free number for all customers. Employers, members and retirees can call VRS using one easy-to-remember toll-free number: 1-888-VARETIR (827-3847). The Richmond area number: 804-649-8059 is being discontinued.

The consolidation of calls to one telephone number is part of a modernization of the VRS telephony systems. The new system, which integrates phone and computer technology, will provide greater capabilities for VRS staff to provide you with a higher level of service.

Although a single number will serve all customers, as an employer you still have a dedicated Employer Support Team in the Customer Contact Center to assist with your questions regarding coverage, rates, legislation, policies, procedures and payroll matters.

To access the Employer Support Team, you will be prompted to enter your five-digit agency code number.

For more complex issues requiring research, information on Employer Forums or for personalized service, you may call your Employer Representative on his or her direct extension.

## **Training & Events**

### **Benefit Administrator Training Provides Insights In Delivering VRS Benefits To Your Employees**

New to the benefits field or just need a refresher? VRS offers two-day benefit training for new and experienced benefits and payroll administrators. Topics covered during the two-day session include VRS resources, VRS membership, refunds, purchase of prior service, service retirement and disability retirement. In preparation for the training, review the *Employer Manual* and bring with you a handheld calculator for estimate practice. Additional training sessions have just been announced; however, seating is limited so register now to secure your place in an upcoming training class.

Register for Benefit Administrator training at [www.varetire.org/baschedule](http://www.varetire.org/baschedule)

### **Payroll Officer Training Covers Basics of Reporting and Reconciliation**

Employer Reporting and Reconciliation Training is designed to help payroll officers with localities and school boards to provide timely, accurate monthly employer reports and employee demographic changes. Both new and experienced payroll officers will find the information useful:

**Employer Reporting.** This one-day training session covers the basics of reporting to VRS, paying VRS, making adjustments and resolving suspended accounts.

Register for Employer Reporting training at [www.varetire.org/erschedule](http://www.varetire.org/erschedule).

**Reconciliation Training.** This two and one-half hour training session focuses on using an Excel spreadsheet to reconcile your account. The spreadsheet can be customized to your needs. Attendance at an Employer Reporting training session is a pre-requisite.

Register for Reconciliation training at [www.varetire.org/reconschedule](http://www.varetire.org/reconschedule).

The Employer Reporting and Reconciliation Training sessions are available from July through November.

### **VRS Schedules Additional Retirement Education Seminars**

Your employees now can take advantage of retirement education opportunities throughout the summer and into the fall. VRS has expanded its schedule of Retirement Education Seminars and Counseling Sessions to extend through October.

The half-day Retirement Education Seminars are for employees who are more than 10 years from retirement. These sessions introduce employees to estate planning and long-term financial planning so they will be prepared for retirement.

Encourage employees within five years of retirement to attend a Group Counseling Session. These sessions give participants the chance to talk with a VRS counselor about benefits and the retirement application process.

Register for a Retirement Education Seminar at [www.varetire.org/ressched](http://www.varetire.org/ressched)

### **Deferred Compensation Education Meetings Now Available on Saturdays**

The Commonwealth of Virginia Deferred Compensation Plan Regional Enrollment and Education Meetings now include Saturday sessions. These meetings introduce employees to the features and benefits of the Deferred Compensation and Cash Match Plans as well as account management and budgeting strategies. Retirees and employees nearing retirement can learn about managing financial resources during retirement by attending Post-Retirement Strategies. Guests are welcome. Pre-registration is not required.

## **Focus on Administration**

### **Are Your Employees Eligible For The Health Insurance Credit When They Retire?**

You could be the key to help your employees receive their health insurance credit. Have them fill out a Request For Health Insurance Credit VRS-45 at retirement and include it with the Application For Service Retirement VRS-5 or Application For Disability Retirement VRS-6.

Eligible employees can receive a health insurance credit to assist with the cost of their health insurance plans, prescription drug plans, dental and vision plans and Medicare Part B and D. Plans for specific health conditions, long-term care and indemnity plans are not eligible.

The health insurance credit is a dollar amount, set by the General Assembly, for each year of service. The health insurance credit is a non-taxable reimbursement of the lesser of the retiree's portion of the premium paid or the health insurance credit amount. It is added to the retiree's monthly benefit.

To be eligible for the credit, your employees must have a minimum of 15 years of total creditable service with a VRS-covered employer when they retire.

These employees are eligible:

- State employees.
- Teachers, administrators or staff members of school boards. Employees of local governments offering the health insurance credit.
- Local officers, general registrars, employees of general registrars or local social service employees.
- Employees retiring on VRS disability (if employer offers a health insurance credit) or receiving a long-term disability benefit through the Virginia Sickness and Disability Program or through a long-term disability plan provided by a college or university.

Employees who enroll in the State Retiree Health Benefits Program at retirement or participate in an employer-sponsored plan for which VRS is deducting health insurance premiums, do not need to complete the VRS-45.

However, retirees must use the VRS-45 to notify VRS when they become eligible for Medicare or if they claim other eligible health insurance premiums such as coverage under an individual policy, coverage under a spouse's plan and dental or vision coverage.

## Forms Update

The following forms are revised and available on the VRS Web site.

**Application for Service Retirement VRS-5** (Rev. 07/06) and **Application for Disability Retirement VRS-6** (Rev. 07/06): updated to clarify questions regarding member's employment after retirement, and to add the position of full-time salaried emergency medical technician (EMT) for employer certification. Additionally, the VRS processing timeframe is clarified. VRS requires 90 days to process retirement applications, and processing cannot begin until all required documents are completed and submitted.

**Request for Member Information Change VRS-48** (Rev. 07/06): updated to reflect that the member's signature is now required on the form only when authorizing changes to the Social Security number. The coverage section has been reorganized and general instructions are provided.

**New Member Enrollment VRS-1500A** (Rev. 07/06): updated to reflect that the special coverage code of 'F' must be used when reporting full-time salaried EMTs.

**Certification of Employment for Health Insurance Credit Eligibility VRS-76** (Rev. 07/06): updated to reflect changes to the eligibility information for general registrars. The monthly premium amount is required for Medicare Part D coverage, and the retiree's certification statement is updated.

**Certification of Hazardous Duty VRS-77** (Rev. 07/06): updated to include full-time salaried EMTs and deputy sheriffs. The form has been reorganized and instructions for full-time salaried EMTs and deputy sheriffs have been included.

Forms for Optional Retirement Plans (ORP):

**Election to Participate in the ORP for Higher Education VRS-65** (Rev. 07/06): updated to include an acknowledgement that the employee has read the ORP Comparison Guide.

**Election to Participate in the ORP for Political Appointees VRS-65C** (Rev. 07/06) and **Election to Participate in the ORP for School Superintendents VRS-71** (Rev. 07/06): updated to reflect that the employee who elects the ORP may transfer VRS member contributions to the selected ORP.