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PRESS RELEASE – For Immediate Release

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South Central Public Health District Offices in Bellevue, Jerome, and Rupert Remain Open for Business

TWIN FALLS- On April 6, 2010, the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare (IDHW) announced it would be closing nine field offices, including Bellevue, Jerome, and Rupert. The announcement **will not** affect the operations of the South Central Public Health District (SCPHD) which also has offices in Bellevue, Jerome, and Rupert. All services of SCPHD will continue as before with the offices being open Monday through Friday.

“People sometimes confuse the offices of the Department of Health and Welfare with those of the health districts,” said Rene LeBlanc, SCPHD Director. “The health districts are not part of Health and Welfare, and we provide services that are unique to public health.”

SCPHD provides childhood vaccinations, the Women, Infants & Children (WIC) program, environmental health, and reproductive health services out of those three offices. Most people visit Department of Health and Welfare offices for public assistance services. People can apply for assistance at any of the remaining 20 Health and Welfare offices and continue accessing assistance applications through the Health and Welfare website

www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov or by calling the Idaho CareLine at 2-1-1.

For more information on the services of the South Central Public Health District and office locations, please visit our website www.phd5.idaho.gov .

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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 6, 2010

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**Department of Health and Welfare Closes Nine Field Offices,
Lays Off 126 Workers Due to Budget Deficit**

As part of a series of measures to address a personnel budget shortfall, the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare will close nine of its 29 offices statewide within the next two months and lay off 126 workers. The closures will cause hardship and inconvenience for many people, but resources are not available to continue the current level of office support.

The offices being closed are:

- American Falls
- Bellevue
- Bonners Ferry
- Emmett
- Jerome
- McCall
- Orofino
- Rupert
- Soda Springs

In addition, the leased office space in St. Maries will be reduced with public assistance application work shifted to the Coeur d'Alene office; child welfare and mental health services will continue operating out of the St. Maries office in a smaller rented space.

In making the decision to close the nine offices, the agency evaluated client traffic at the offices, the ability to deliver services from another location, and the savings potential of office sites. Of the 87 workers employed at the affected offices, 21 positions will be eliminated because of the closures, with the remaining staff reassigned to other offices. The additional 105 positions being reduced include 32 from administrative offices in Boise and 73 from DHW's other regional offices or institutions. The office closures and layoffs are expected to save \$7 million.

To Access DHW Assistance Services:

- Go to a DHW office; 20 will remain open. For a list of the office locations visit www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov
- Call the 2-1-1 Idaho CareLine.
- Visit www.welfareassistance.dhw.idaho.gov for information about public assistance programs.

(more)

Most people visit DHW offices for public assistance services. People can apply for assistance at any of the remaining 20 Health and Welfare office and continue accessing assistance applications through the [DHW website](#), or by calling the Idaho CareLine at 2-1-1. Most Food Stamp applications require a face-to-face interview, which in some circumstances may be completed by telephone. Child welfare and mental health services will continue to be provided in the communities where offices are closed.

By consolidating the remaining workforce, DHW can gain additional savings and efficiencies. The agency can reduce administrative support costs and equalize work among staff. As an example, in child welfare work, the caseloads at the offices being closed are frequently less than the caseloads carried at the other offices. This work can be more evenly distributed and equalized with the reduction of office sites. Also, with fewer staff available and increased workloads for remaining staff, consolidating offices will help the agency maintain effective supervision, along with consistency in service delivery.

DHW benefit assistance application processing has been recognized nationally for timeliness and accuracy over the last several years. With office closures and staff reductions, customer service will be negatively impacted. People will see longer wait times for phone responses, application processing, and to physically meet with DHW staff for face-to-face interviews. With reduced staff and resources, DHW business office priorities will focus on crisis management, with the top priority being to stabilize individual families who have run out of food or are at risk of homelessness. Despite the circumstances, DHW staff remain committed to providing the best possible customer service with the resources available.

Workers who are being laid off were notified this morning, April 6. Most will continue work through May 18th. DHW Human Resource staff are assisting affected workers with information on unemployment benefits, health insurance and other support options. The offices announced for closure will experience different closure dates due to leases and timeframes for transferring remaining staff, but actions should be completed during the month of May.

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