

ALMIS Database Versions— What's the Fuss About?

By Steve Rosenow, National Crosswalk Service Center

Employer Database News

infoUSA has completed the October 2004 release of the ALMIS Employer Database via FTP in the format negotiated under the new Iowa contract. They have also shipped copies of the CD-Rom in the quantities requested by the States. If you have not received the download information or the CD-Rom please contact Daniel Brown at 515-281-5093 or email, (employer.database@iwd.state.ia.us)

The release of a new version of the ALMIS Database, much like changes to the federal tax code, is usually greeted with a variety of reactions. Some embrace the changes in the new version because they address issues that have developed in the version they're using. Others react with a Schoolhouse Rock-like "conversion aversion." So, why does the database structure keep changing? And, should you always be either using or converting to the most current version? Here's some help.

First, let's look at some of the changes that are included in the new structure, Version 2.3, and how those changes will make life easier for the average ALMIS Database administrator.

Two significant events led to many of the changes embodied in version 2.3: the incorporation of the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) into federal data systems, and the signing of a new contract for delivery of the ALMIS Employer Database. Of the 28 tables with changes, ten were related to NAICS and one to the new Employer Database. Of the 15 new tables, two related to NAICS and four to the new Employer Database. Other significant changes included addition of a Mass Layoffs Statistics summary table and a significant revision to the Licensing tables.

Next, what are the penalties for using an earlier version of the database? Members of

the ALMIS Resource Center who work on the database structure like to think that the changes in each version constitute such major improvements that state database administrators will be compelled to begin using the new version as soon as they can. In reality, many times, the changes will nudge state DBAs in the direction of the new version. A number of other factors also come into play. A significant limiting factor is the state's delivery systems. Unless these systems are modified to handle the new structure's features, the state cannot implement the new version in their production environment. At the same time, some changes are so far-reaching that their incorporation cannot be postponed indefinitely. Incorporating the

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DBA in the Spotlight

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Are you originally from Florida? From Florida, and currently live in Tallahassee

What are your interests outside of work? Avid tennis player, traveling with family, and amateur photography

What is your favorite work-related website (other than www.almisdb.org) and why? The National Crosswalk Service Center because it is an invaluable source of information and Steve Rosenow and his staff really make my job easier by providing formatted data for the ALMIS Database.

Do you have any project management tools or tips you'd like to share with other DBAs? DOCUMENT! DOCUMENT! DOCUMENT!

loading procedures; familiarize yourself with the ALMIS structure, and don't hesitate to encourage your LMI associates to use data that we have in the ALMIS structures and use the ALMIS structure as a guide to creating other relational databases if needed.

What training have you taken recently and would you recommend it to other DBAs? Managing an ArcGIS database and web server. Would recommend if interested in mapping for the Internet.

What is the strangest job you ever held? Can't think of any per se, however I have definitely encountered strange people on some of those jobs.

What is the most rewarding aspect of your current job? Having the ability to learn so much about the labor market; and how LMI data can be presented and delivered in so many format such as LMI delivery system, website, or even maps.

What is most interesting or awe-inspiring place you have been? Until recently, the Rocky Mountain National Park - Estes Park area of Colorado, but I have to give my recent ALMIS DBA trip to Kalispell, MT top bill now. Glacier...rules! Even though i almost had a heart attack during the drive up to Logan's Pass and taking the hike.

How long have you been an ALMIS DBA? 4 years 9 months

What is your educational background? Attended Univ. of FL where I majored in Computer Information Systems & Mathematical Sciences

Test Your DBA Knowledge!

Match the following terms to the definitions below:

Stored Procedures, Views, Triggers, Privileges, Aliases

- _____ These are best described as “virtual tables.” They are not a stored table in the database, but rather instructions on how to create a temporary table for the user when needed. They become useful when trying to show multiple table data (especially to non-system admins).
- _____ This is the ability for a system admin of a relational database admin to be able to set which users can view/execute objects in the database
- _____ This is a special type of stored procedure that is automatically executed when some pre-determined action occurs. These are used in the ALMIS Database to maintain indcodes and occodes.
- _____ This is a shorthand notation for a pre-determined set of instructions. Queries that are used repetitively (especially those by a website for example) are often written as these so they may be used easily.
- _____ When writing long queries using multiple tables, sometimes it is useful to give your tables these. This allows shorter keystrokes per query required.

(Answers on Page 4!)

...ALMIS Database Versions, continued

(Continued from page 1)

changes in a piecemeal fashion will eventually result in a database that doesn't closely resemble any of the standard versions. At some point, the "law of unintended consequences" may have an impact, leaving the state with an ALMIS Database that may misbehave in unusual ways. At that point, support for the database becomes limited—the state may be dealing with issues that haven't been experienced by anyone else. The ARC provides significant help to states in their efforts to populate the ALMIS Database. However, this help is significantly diminished in the case of non-standard database structures.

Finally, are all of these changes really improvements? Even if they are, can't we live without them? Generally speaking, the changes result in improvements. They're screened to ensure that the benefits will be significant for most states. Tables that reflect any single state's unique data collection programs are not included. You'll find an illustration of the type of improvements that are made in Version 2.3's licensing table. The

occupational license table (LICENSE) did not address situations in which a relatively broad occupational license (teachers, physicians, engineers) can relate to multiple occupations. The inclusion of the licensing data in ACINet (http://www.acinet.org/acinet/lois_start.asp), illustrates the tradeoffs faced by state DBAs. ACINet includes two methods of accessing the licensing data: first, through a search of the licensing database by either state, occupation or licensing data; and second, through links from state-specific occupational reports. Similarly, states generally use one of two approaches for dealing with the broad licenses. Either they create separate records for each license-occupation combination (engineer license to mechanical, civil, safety and other engineers), or they pick a single occupation, usually the residual (all other engineers). Their approach affects the display of their information in ACINet. If they use the first approach, they maximize the links from the occupational reports but present a somewhat

confusing list of identical occupations when they access the licensing data directly. Those using the second approach present a cleaner list when users access the licensing data directly, but miss many of the links from the state-specific occupational reports. Changes to the licensing tables found in Version 2.3 of the ALMIS Database deal with both access methods by incorporating a separate license-to-occupation crosswalk. The access to and display of licensing information in ACINet (and state delivery systems) will improve once both states and ACINet are using the new structure.

In addition to the standardized table structures and content available through the National Crosswalk Service Center, the ARC maintains a web site with many useful links and a helpdesk function (<http://www.almisdb.org/9helpdesk.cfm>) for your use.

DBA in the Spotlight

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forms of traveling. Recently, we spent an extended weekend at Seaside, Oregon. We also have a cat and three aquariums. When I have time, I like canoeing on Puget Sound and on several local lakes.

What is your favorite work-related web site (other than the www.almisdb.org site)? Why?

I'll cheat and provide a couple favorites. First, Workforceexplorer.com since this is Washington's LMI site. Also, I like the functionality of Oregon's OLMIS in terms of its use of vertical and horizontal navigation and its custom reports.

What training have you taken recently and would you recommend it to other DBAs?

Most of my training recently has been agency customer service training. In the past I've taken Microsoft SQL Server training and Visual FoxPro training. I recommend the former for those working with SQL Server (although I think the structured query language itself should be learned by all DBAs). I perform most of my pre-WorkforceExplorer data manipulations in

FoxPro and am strongly biased, perhaps erroneously, in thinking that it's superior to other database programs.

What is the strangest job you ever held?

Inking mink pelts in a fur warehouse – although I'm reluctant to admit to it now. Basically, the pelts were sorted by grade then marked on the inside with a stamp (i.e. 'inked') designating the grade.

What is the most rewarding aspect of your current job?

Receiving positive feedback from happy customers.

What is the most challenging aspect of your current job?

Integrating ALMIS data within a front-end application.

What is the most interesting or awe-inspiring place you've been?

Mount St. Helens is both the most interesting and awe-inspiring place I've been. My wife and I visited St. Helen's two summers ago and one cannot fail to be impressed with the immensity of the

destruction caused by the 1980 eruption. The plains north of the mountain are still mostly barren as can be seen at the Mt. St. Helens web cam (<http://www.fs.fed.us/gpnf/volcanocams/msh/>). Not visible on the cam are the hills surrounding the blast-zone. These are covered with fallen, grey, lifeless trees that are all pointing in the same direction – away from the mountain. Very interesting, awe-inspiring and, mostly, surreal.

Read any good books lately (personal or work-related) that you would recommend others read?

One Hundred Years of Solitude by Gabriel Garcia Marquez and *Sailing Alone Around the Room : New and Selected Poems* by Billy Collins (the previous U.S. Poet Laureate). Currently I'm reading *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* by John Steinbeck which I decided to read it while visiting the National Steinbeck Center in Salinas, CA, last July. Work-Related, *Teach Yourself Active Web Database Programming in 21 Days* which I've been reading for about three years.

How long have you been involved in the world of LMI?
Eight years.

How long have you been an ALMIS DBA?

I've been an ALMIS DBA for my full LMI tenure beginning with the OLMID structure.

What is your educational background?

B.S., M.S. in Behavioral Science from Washington State University. A lot of statistics. My research involved human memory and differences in recall for bizarre vs. non-bizarre visual stimuli.

Are you originally from Washinton?

Yes - I'm pretty much 100% Washingtonian.

What are your interests outside of work?

Outside of work, I like to read, watch old movies and spend time with my spouse. We enjoy camping and other

Answers to Quiz on Page 2:

Views, Privileges, Triggers, Stored Procedures, Aliases

ARC Meeting Highlights

The ALMIS Resource Center met in Kalispell, Montana on August 3–5, 2004.

Introduction/Objectives

Joan Crum welcomed everyone to Montana and introductions were made around the room. The agenda for the week and previous meeting's notes were handed out while Bob Cottrell outlined the objectives for the meeting. Members gave updates on various policy councils and workgroups, the Workforce Information Council (WIC), the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), and the Employment and Training Administration (ETA).

Subcommittee Updates and Action Items

Employer Database/Policy and Procedures Subcommittee

Jeffrey Nall handed out an informational sheet on the Employer Database. They have received five silver masters (CD-ROMs) in the new format and there were some minor anomalies. As of last Friday, the silver masters were being sent to license holders. Iowa established an email contact (Dan Brown) (employer.database@iwd.state.ia.us) for Employer Database related concerns and questions. Jeff asked that Iowa serve as the "hub" on Employer Database related issues in order to efficiently address questions and asked that they be cc'd on emails from states to infoUSA.

Members discussed the benefits of maintaining a focus on building a knowledge

base or repository of Employer Database questions as they came in and additionally look at highlighting and featuring the information in a "What's New" section on www.almisdb.org and set aside a significant amount of time at next year's ARC Seminar to focus on the uses of the Employer Database.

Bob Cottrell reported that the Policy Subcommittee had discussed core tables and based upon funding issues decided to make no changes to the list of required core tables with the exception of removing lichist and associated tables. The issue will be revisited in the future. Vicki Boylston asked the Structure and Policy Subcommittees to review the core element content that is on ARC's Web site to ensure accuracy since the TEGL directs staff to that Web site for further information.

The Policy and Education and Communication Subcommittees also discussed exploring the opportunities or possibilities of expanding training related to the Employer Database and the ALMIS Database for local decision making.

Structure Subcommittee

Roger Therrien reported that ALMIS Database Version 2.3 was initially planned for a June 2004 release. Several structure issues were still being debated. At this point, however, the Subcommittee has decided that in order to

keep the release of Version 2.3 from being delayed further, those items would be included in a future version release.

During the week, the Structure Subcommittee worked intensively on a variety of issues, including:

- 1) Refining revisions and edits for the Version 2.3 release,
- 2) Reviewing the recommended LED structure submitted by Illinois and Florida,
- 3) Review of the Job Vacancy table structure,
- 4) Review of the MLS data table structure, and
- 5) Determining content to add to NCSC's ALMIS Database "Non-Standard Tables" Web page.

Education and Communication Subcommittee

Vicki Boylston reported that an ALMIS Database class had been held in June 2004 in Raleigh, North Carolina and was very successful. A future ALMIS Database classroom training was proposed for Spring 2005. The future class would be somewhat broader in scope including a combination of the applied content and introductory content.

It was suggested at a previous meeting that a one-page fact sheet be developed for the Web site that conveys what the ARC is and does. Two fact sheets will be developed: one designated for an internal

audience and one geared more toward an external audience illustrating solutions relevant to WIBs that are provided through ARC. Both sheets will be placed on the Web site and could be printed and used for handouts at various presentations. A draft for review of one of the fact sheets was presented at this week's meeting.

A monthly conference call continues to be held to review the ARC Web site and changes and updates are being made to the site as quickly as possible. If anyone has any ideas or suggestions, now would be a good time to submit those as a more extensive review and revision of the Web site is coming up.

This year the LMI Forum will be held October 2004 in Portland, Oregon. It was agreed to contact the LMI Institute about the possibility of doing a workshop. A recommendation was also made to have any extra copies of handouts, progress reports and CD items available on the publication tables.

A framework for the production of several sets of education and communication tools drawn from the 2003 ALMIS Database Seminar was developed, including:

- 1) Overview of ARC in the form of a self-running business card-sized interactive CD-ROM (already in development),
- 2) More focused and

...ARC Meeting Highlights, continued

- interactive CD-ROM containing detailed information on ARC products and services,
- 3) Set of topical ARC training DVDs incorporating presentations and filmed training sessions to be sent to states as a training package,
 - 4) Interactive CD-ROM or DVD presentation geared toward "frontline staff", workforce boards and board researchers as they look at this new world of information and what's available.

The developed concept, script and some video excerpts from the business card-sized interactive CD-ROM were presented to and approved by members.

Members decided to continue with publication of a Progress Report scheduled for dissemination in January/February 2005 with an update to the Progress Report in June/July 2005 in the form of a more abbreviated report or brochure. The Education and Communication Subcommittee also discussed the possibility of exploring a variety of partnering/participation opportunities during the next year as a means of maintaining strong communications in the Workforce Information and Workforce Development community.

A recommendation was made by the group to explore holding an ARC Seminar tentatively scheduled for early September 2005 possibly in Minnesota. The seminar would be 2-1/2 days, as

was the seminar held November 2003.

A discussion was held to plan content for the next two issues of the ARC newsletter. Articles and contributors were assigned.

National Crosswalk Service Center – Steve Rosenow and Joanna Hendrickson-Larson presented an overview and shared practical applications of RSS as a means of introducing members to the use of RSS as a communication tool for the ARC and NCSC.

Steve gave a further review of the XML link on the NCSC site and the sampling of RSS feeds available. Jeff Dreiling demonstrated how RSS feeds were being used in Oregon at www.qualityinfo.org and discussed the RSS Reader and aggregators. Joanna Hendrickson-Larson reviewed the NCSC update handout.

ETA requirements for ALMIS Database upgrades were reviewed and discussed by member states. Currently, states are encouraged to use the most current release and there is an understanding that there is a transition of 6-12 months to modify applications. A recommendation was made to begin communicating the new ALMIS Database archival process with states, specifically, that ARC will no longer be maintaining Version 1.1 in the future. Due to time and resource constraints, NCSC will support the three most current versions and then archive the oldest version one year later.

Miscellaneous

A recommendation was made to hold the next ARC meeting in November or early December 2004 in either Minnesota or South Carolina.

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Center

news

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The ALMIS Database is a normalized, relational database structure developed for the storage and maintenance of labor market, economic, demographic and occupational information. The ALMIS Resource Center is responsible for the ALMIS Database structure development, update, and maintenance. Members include North Carolina (lead), Connecticut, Georgia, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, North Carolina, Oregon, South Carolina, Wisconsin, and ETA, along with support from the National Crosswalk Service Center and the LMI Institute.