



# United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
Washington, DC 20240



**MAY 24 2010**

PERSONNEL BULLETIN NO. 10-05

SUBJECT: Excused Absence in Emergency Situations

1. **Purpose.** This replaces Personnel Bulletin 06-02. This Personnel Bulletin establishes the parameters and approval authorities for administering excused absence during emergency situations.

2. **Authority.** The authority to excuse employees from duty without loss of pay or charge to leave in the case of emergency situations is delegated as follows:

- (1) Authority to grant excused absence up to 30 days in response to emergency situations is granted to the local level with bureau/office head concurrence.
- (2) Authority to grant excused absence of over 30 days in response to emergency situations is granted to bureau/office heads, with concurrence of the Chief Human Capital Officer.

3. **Emergency Situations.** Emergency conditions are defined as situations in which significant numbers of employees are prevented from reporting to work on time, or in which the closing of all or part of the Department's activities is required. Such conditions can include, but are not limited to snow emergencies, severe icing conditions, floods, earthquakes, major fires, public health or safety emergencies, hurricanes, air pollution, power failures, or widespread interruption of public transportation.

4. **Closing.** When an emergency condition results in the closing of all or part of the Department's activities for one or more whole days, all employees of offices affected by the closing will be excused from work without charge to leave, including employees who would otherwise have been on approved paid leave. However, employees in the following categories are not entitled to excused absence and shall remain in their current status:

- (1) On leave without pay (LWOP) pending disability;
- (2) In receipt of workers' compensation;
- (3) On military leave;
- (4) On suspension; or
- (5) In a nonpay status on the last hour of the workday immediately before and the first hour of the workday after the closure.

- (6) Employees who are approved to telework if their alternate work-site is not affected by the emergency.
- (7) Employees whose Alternate Work Schedule (AWS) regular day off falls on the closure will not be entitled to an additional "in lieu of" day off.

**Unscheduled Leave.** When an emergency condition occurs before the workday begins, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) may announce an unscheduled leave policy which permits non-emergency employees to take annual leave or LWOP without prior approval of the leave-approving official. Non-emergency employees electing to take leave are expected to call in and inform their leave-approving official of their intentions.

**Delayed Arrival.** When an emergency condition occurs before the workday begins, OPM may announce a delayed arrival. This means that non-emergency employees are expected to report for work no later than the designated number of hours past their normal arrival time. In this situation, non-emergency employees will be excused without charge to leave or loss of pay for the period from normal arrival time at work until the expected arrival time at work. Employees who arrive later than their expected arrival time will be charged annual leave or leave without pay for the additional period of absence from work. Employees on previously approved scheduled leave for the entire day remain in the same leave status and are not granted excused absence for the period from normal departure time to the announcement time.

**Delayed Arrival/Unscheduled Leave.** When an emergency condition occurs before the workday begins, a delayed arrival may be announced in conjunction with an unscheduled leave policy. In this situation, non-emergency employees should follow the delayed arrival and unscheduled leave policies listed above.

Tardiness beyond an employee's actual arrival time at the work site when a delayed arrival is announced may be excused at the discretion of the leave-approving official if the employee made a reasonably diligent effort to get to work on time. In determining the amount of additional excused absence to grant employees, leave-approving officials should consider such factors as distance, availability and mode of transportation, and the success of other employees in similar situations in reaching the workplace.

The above situations apply to all employees except emergency or mission critical employees who are expected to report to work on time and those employees not entitled to excused absence as listed above under "Closing."

**Early Dismissal (formally Adjusted Work Dismissal).** When an emergency condition results in the early closing of an activity, OPM may announce an early dismissal in which employees will be dismissed relative to their normal departure times from work consistent with the announcement. For example, if a 3-hour early dismissal is announced due to inclement weather, an employee who normally leaves the office at 5:00 p.m. would be authorized to leave at 2:00 p.m. Supervisors have the discretion to exempt employees from their authorized dismissal times only to avoid hardships such as when younger children are released early from school and no alternative forms of child care are available. Employees excused for this reason are not to be charged personal leave.

- (1) Employees who are in a duty status at the time an early dismissal is announced will be excused without charge to leave for the remainder of the workday even if they were scheduled to take leave later in the day.
- (2) Employees who are in a duty status at the time an early dismissal is announced as described above but leave before their authorized dismissal with approval from the leave-approving official (but not due to a hardship) will be charged annual leave or LWOP for the rest of the scheduled workday.
- (3) Employees scheduled to report to work before the authorized dismissal, but who do not report for duty, shall be charged leave or AWOL for the entire period of absence.
- (4) Employees on previously approved leave prior to the start of the workday shall continue to be charged leave for the entire workday.
- (5) Employees scheduled to return from leave after the announcement of dismissal but before their authorized dismissal, will continue to be charged leave until their dismissal time. Absence after the time of dismissal shall be charged as excused absence even if the employee is scheduled to take leave later in the day.
- (6) Employees scheduled to report to work after an early dismissal is announced may be granted excused absence for the remainder of the workday even if they were scheduled to take leave later in the day.

The above does not apply to employees who have been designated as emergency or mission critical employees unless they are instructed otherwise.

**5. Washington, D.C. Metro Area Dismissal and Closure Procedures.** Unscheduled leave policies, delayed arrivals and early dismissals, or closure of activities in emergency situations for work locations inside the Washington D.C. Capital Beltway are governed by OPM.

When an emergency condition occurs outside of normal working hours, OPM will announce the decision to close facilities or adjust arrival/departure times through the media. If OPM, in conjunction with local government and transportation officials, decides to close agencies because of emergency conditions occurring during work hours, it will notify the Director for Human Resources Management of the decision.

The Director for Human Resources Management or a designated staff member will notify principal human resource managers of the decision to close work emergency or mission critical. Principal human resource managers are responsible for notifying heads of operating units of the decision. They, in turn, are responsible for passing the word through proper chains of command.

Each operating unit must prescribe procedures by which management officials are notified of closings. Operating units with shift workers must establish procedures governing the leave or work status of shift employees during emergency situations in which employees on standard schedules are excused for all or part of the ordinary work day. These procedures must also prescribe how shift workers are to be notified.

Operating units will dismiss employees according to the Washington, DC, Area Emergency Dismissal or Closure Procedures. An operating unit that needs an exemption from the dismissal

or closure procedures for certain organizational units within the metropolitan area must seek approval from the Director for Human Resources Management before publishing internal procedures.

**6. Dismissal Procedures outside of the Washington DC Area** It is within the authority of heads of operating units or their designees to excuse employees from work at locations outside the Washington D.C. Capital Metro Area in the event of emergency conditions. These managers are responsible for establishing dismissal and closure plans and emergency operating procedures. In locations with Federal Executive Boards (FEB), managers should follow decisions made by FEBs.

Where there are several Department of the Interior offices housed together and affected by the same emergency, they should coordinate their plans and act in unison as far as it is feasible. The Director for Human Resources Management must be apprized when excused absences in excess of 3 days, closure of facilities, or evacuation is likely to occur.

This discretionary authority should not be exercised when:

- (1) Conditions at the place of work are clearly intolerable or inadequate;
- (2) Employees are or would be prevented from reporting to work despite reasonable efforts; or
- (3) Local government officials have requested that emergency or mission critical be shut down.

Emergency conditions do not include reasonably foreseeable conditions of employment, such as inclement weather which precludes work by outside construction workers. Suspension of work emergency or mission critical because of such conditions is not a basis for excused absence.

**7. Operating Unit Dismissal Plans.** Operating unit plans governing the dismissal of employees must include the following as a minimum:

- (1) Identification of organizational units and locations covered;
- (2) The criteria governing decisions about leave situations and work locations, and how decisions will be communicated to employees;
- (3) Identification of the officials authorized to close a work location; and
- (4) Prompt notification to the Director for Human Resources Management of any such closing or dismissal.

**8. Requests for concurrence.** Requests for concurrence of the decision to grant excused absence in the case of emergency situations must explain the extent of the emergency, the anticipated length of time that employees will be carried on excused absence, and the expected plan of action to recover from the emergency and return employees to full duty.

**9. Plan of Action Following Emergencies.** Bureaus/offices should have in place Continuity of Operations Plans (COOP) procedures to account for their employees in the case of extreme disasters/emergencies. Bureaus/offices will work diligently to facilitate swift return of employees to work. Options which should be considered following an emergency or disaster situation include:

- (1) Evaluating work sites in the affected areas to determine whether all or a portion of the building could provide a safe work environment for employees to return to work;
- (2) Locating alternative worksites, such as in leased commercial space;
- (3) Relocating employees to another geographic location where workspace can be leased or shared;
- (4) Cooperating with other Federal agencies in surrounding areas to share workspace; and
- (5) Approving telework for eligible employees at either a telework or private residence.

**10. Reporting Requirements.** Bureaus/offices must report to the Chief Human Capital Officer, through the Director, Office of Human Resources on the use of excused absence during an emergency situation. The initial report will be due after the first 30 days following an emergency or disaster situation. Subsequently, reports will be due at the end of each pay period as long as employees remain on excused absence. Reports must include the number of employees, by duty location, on excused absence because of the emergency situation; and for each employee, total number of hours excused absence for that pay period and the cumulative number of hours of excused absence related to that emergency situation.

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