United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, D.C. 20240

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Memorandum

To: Bureau and Office Human Resource Directors

From: Sharlyn A. Grigsby
Director, Office of Human Resources

Subject: Telework Preparedness and Managing Resources during a pandemic.

During a pandemic, telework is a critical method for creating social distancing while continuing to meet the mission of the Department of the Interior. (DOI)

The key to successful telework program in the event of a pandemic health crisis is having a routinely used, already in place, functioning telework program. In some cases, this may entail utilizing creative thinking beyond the current implementation of telework. The challenge is to draw employees into the telework program who otherwise might not engage in the remote access and telework that may be required in a large scale social distancing event.

Bureaus and Offices have broad discretionary authority to determine telework eligibility criteria for their employees. Eligibility criteria should be detailed in each Bureau, and Office telework policy. Additionally, Bureaus and Offices may provide managers the discretion in deciding whether to grant or deny a request to telework from an eligible employee based on important factors such as staffing, workload and other matters that impact the ability of the DOI to accomplish its mission.

Managers and Supervisors should:

- familiarize themselves and their employees with DOI, Bureau, and Office telework policies.
- determine whether or not their employees can participate in the telework program.
- assess employee eligibility in their workgroup based on their Bureau and Office eligibility guidelines and take into consideration any applicable collective bargaining agreements that may have been negotiated.
- work with individual teleworkers to ensure they fully understand the relevant policies and procedures to protect and secure the assets of the DOI.
- establish that they are in compliance with policies concerning information security, records and privacy policies, and understand the development and use of sensitive documents. The use of sensitive documents may be required to accomplish and complete certain assignments.

- discuss telework with the requesting employee, and communicate your expectation/s.
- ensure the telework agreement is signed and dated by both the teleworker and his/her manager.
- maintain records and keep copies of all telework agreements on file.

Individual Employees must:

- communicate their desire or need for telework.
- discuss their expectation/s and establish a telework agreement.
- ensure a safe and effective telework environment.
- be responsible for complying and maintaining information security, records security and privacy requirements.
- update their training on a regular basis concerning DOI information systems security; understand the proper use and securing of sensitive records, and privacy act training.

The telework agreement provides a framework for the discussion that needs to take place between the manager and the employee about their work and assignment expectations. These discussions should identify assignments, discuss communication/s and establish the expectation of the work product/s that is/are required to accomplish our mission.

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) identifies three types of telework: Full-time, part-time, and situational. In a full-time telework situation, the employee completes all or almost all work duties outside of a traditional office setting. In a part-time telework situation, the employee teleworks on a regularly scheduled basis, but not normally a full five (5) day workweek. For example, the employee may telework one (1) or more days a week, every two (2) weeks, or several days in a month. Situational or episodic teleworkers do not telework on a regular basis. This type of telework opportunity may be a result of a medical problem, inclement weather or hazardous conditions, or the need to be focused on a special project.

The parameters of the telework agreement are established within the telework policy and should be in compliance with any specific collective bargaining agreement that may be in effect. Telework agreements are living documents and should be revisited by the manager and teleworker and re-signed on a regular basis, preferably at least once a year. New telework agreements should be executed when a new employee/manager relationship is established or created. DOI has provided Bureaus and Offices a sample telework agreement that may be used to accomplish this tasking. Bureaus and Offices are responsible for, and encouraged to use the DOI sample telework agreement and tailor it to meet the Bureau or Office's specific needs.

Since the Federal telework program and policies cover only Federal employees, Federal contractors are not governed by OPM and GSA telework guidance or by DOI policies. However, this does not prohibit, and should not prevent, contract employees from

actually teleworking, as appropriate. Telework arrangements for contractors should be negotiated with both the contractor's own employer and with the appropriate Bureau and Office official, so policies and procedures are in close alignment and all concerned parties are in agreement. Telework language may even be integrated into the contract itself.

There are numerous websites that provide telework information. DOI agency guidance for telework is found in the Human Capital Management Policy for Pandemic Influenza at http://www.opm.gov/pandemic/agency/telework.asp. The DOI Telework Policy is available at http://www.doi.gov/hrm/guidance/PB05-02t.pdf. Telework information for coordinators, managers and employees is located at http://www.telework.gov/. Manager and Supervisor Responsibilities during a Pandemic can be found at https://opm.gov/pandemic/agency2a-guide.pdf

If a pandemic affects particular area/s where DOI employees work, Bureau and Office officials may order an evacuation upon official announcement by Federal, State or local officials, public health authorities, and/or Tribal governments. Bureaus and Offices should seek guidance prior to exercising these authorities.

DOI believes combining evacuation payments and telework may reduce the need to use excused absences and promote "social distancing" while still facilitating the accomplishment of our mission. A link to evacuation payments can be found at http://www.opm.gov/oca/pay/HTML/EVAC.HTM.

If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact Joy Buhler at 202-219-0811 or Nick Chomycia at 202-208-6107; or they may be contacted via email at joy_buhler@ios.doi/gov or nicholas_chomycia@ios.doi.gov.