

Forest Service Telecommuting Policy and Guidance

as agreed to by the Forest Service Partnership Council April 18, 2002

(Note: for the purpose of the MOU between the FS and the NFFE FSC, “employee” and “employees” as used in this document refer only to NFFE FSC Bargaining Unit Employees.)

The following Telecommuting Guidance contains the policy, criteria and procedures for the implementation of the USDA Forest Service Telecommuting Program. This guidance was prepared through a joint effort involving management and Union officials working collaboratively (Forest Service Partnership Council) to meet the intent and objectives of the referenced legislation.

Introduction

The 1990 Federal Flexible Workplace (Flexiplace) Pilot Program was developed by Office of Personnel Management and General Services Administration (GSA), and established in response to a recommendation by the President’s Council on Management Improvement. The pilot program was implemented with the support of the White House, Congress, and the major unions representing Federal employees. It was designed to test alternatives to the traditional work environment.

Telecommuting is an innovative management tool that provides employees with the opportunity to perform their duties at alternative worksites during an agreed upon portion of their workweek. Telecommuting, also known as flexible workplace, work-at-home, flexiplace, and teleworking, refers to paid employment performed away from the office.

The program’s objective is to allow employees to work at alternative worksites on a regularly scheduled basis (versus unscheduled or occasional performance of work by employees at an alternate work site).

Telecommuting locations may include:

- Employee’s home—working in a space specifically set aside as an office or other appropriate area in the employee’s residence.
- Satellite facility—working from a telework center or an office near the employee’s home, in space owned or leased by one or more agencies. Satellite center employees work there primarily because it is close to their home, not necessarily because they belong to the same work unit.

Objectives

To maintain or improve operational efficiency and productivity in achieving the Forest Service mission and unit/staff program goals while enriching the quality of work life.

Benefits

Telecommuting offers an alternative to the traditional work environment that yields significant benefits to the Agency and the individual employee:

- Employees who telecommute are often more productive and generate better quality work because of the quiet environment where interruptions are minimized.

- Experience has demonstrated improved employee commitment to ensuring that office coverage is maintained, quality of work is maintained or improved, and management/employee communications are strengthened. In short, employees want to perpetuate the benefit they have been given.
- Employees avoid arduous commutes to high-density urban areas, thus having more productive time available to carry out work assignments as opposed to sitting in traffic. This reduces employee stress levels and could contribute to better health.
- Less commuting improves the environment reducing air pollution that results from traffic congestion.
- Management can attract and retain employees in critical occupations and positions; targeting labor markets such as handicapped individuals; and enabling offices to more efficiently conduct their work by allowing increased flexibility in the location of the work site. The telecommuting program is an excellent way to attract individuals who are mobility-limited. Technological advances enable managers to support the disabled person with equipment that accommodates the individual's impairment.
- Employees who are injured, recuperating, and physically limited may be able to work at home and complete work assignments while minimizing sick leave use. Units may be able to find work that such employees can perform at home or restructure their existing work to perform specific duties from home.

Authorities

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) issued guidance in FPM Letter 368-1, Federal Flexible Workplace (Flexiplace) Project dated March 26, 1991.

2 U.S.C. 61h-6 allows agencies to use funds to install telephone lines, and necessary equipment, and to pay monthly charges in any private residence or private apartment of an employee who has been authorized to work-at-home.

Public Law 104-52 Treasury, Postal Service, and General Government Appropriations Act, 1996, authorized funds for the Administrator of the General Services Administration for the acquisition, lease, construction, and equipping of telecommuting centers.

Public Law 105-277 allows the Administrator of the General Services Administration to charge a user fee for flexiplace telecommuting centers.

Public Law 106-346 Department of Transportation Appropriations Act, 2001, Section 359 requires each agency to establish a policy on telecommuting for eligible employees to the maximum extent possible without diminishing employee performance.

Guidelines for Establishing a Telework Program

When establishing a telework program, managers should keep in mind the basic guidelines listed below:

- Managers should begin with a presumption that all positions are appropriate for Telework. This positive analytical approach focuses managers' attention on the nature of the work and job characteristics when determining whether a position is suitable for telework. In many cases, 100 percent of a position will not lend itself to Telework. Focus on discrete job tasks that can be performed away from the main office.

- Teleworking is a management option rather than an employee benefit and does not change the terms and conditions of appointment.
- Generally, employee participation is voluntary and subject to management approval. Management may require an alternative work arrangement in unusual circumstances, such as natural disasters or working conditions that compromise employee safety.
- An employee who works a telework schedule (other than for short periods) will be required to obtain prior written approval from management.
- Canceling the work arrangement is up to either the employee or management, with notice and in accordance with the procedures herein described.
- Telework should not adversely affect the performance of the employee who is telecommuting or his or her coworkers.
- Management must properly certify time and attendance.
- The employee must have a safe and adequate place to work off-site that is free from undue interruptions and that provides the necessary level of security and protection for Government property.
- Although telework will give some employees more time for their family responsibilities, they may not use duty time for providing dependent care or any purpose other than official duties.
- The Government may place Government owned computers and telecommunications equipment in employee homes or at other alternative worksites, but the Government retains ownership and control of hardware, software, and data. Such equipment is to be used consistent with USDA Forest Service's Limited Personal Use of Telecommunications Resources and Office Equipment Policy, and its repair and maintenance are the responsibility of the agency.
- Agencies may provide employees with telephone credit cards. To the extent permitted by law, agencies may pay for the installation of telephone lines in private residences. Public Law 104-52 allows agencies to use funds to install telephone lines, and necessary equipment, and to pay monthly charges in any private residence or private apartment of an employee who has been authorized to work-at-home.

Policy

The Forest Service will implement telecommuting, also referred to as alternative workplace, work-at-home, flexiplace, and telework in order to reduce traffic congestion, improve employee morale, improve the quality of life of its employees, and to maintain and improve the efficiency of the agency. Authorization of employee participation must be conducted in an equitable, fair, and consistent manner. All proposed telecommuting arrangements must be carefully evaluated based on cost, productivity and quality of life implications. Management retains the right to expand or limit an employee's participation in the telecommuting program based on the guidance and criteria contained herein. Telecommuting should be mutually agreeable to both management and the employee. Management shall not require an employee to work at home or at a telework center without the employee's consent. However, management may require an alternative work arrangement, but not at the employee's residence, in unusual circumstances such as natural disasters or working conditions that compromise employee safety. Management has the right to meet with employees to give assignments and to review work as necessary at either the official duty station or a mutually agreed upon site.

Units may find it necessary to establish their own policy on the purchase and installation of telework equipment. Some units may agree to purchase or install equipment, while others, due to budget constraints or other management reasons, may choose not to. Units may make this decision on a case-by-case basis considering such factors as the nature of the work, availability of existing equipment, reasonable accommodation requests, etc. In some instances, participation in the program may be contingent on equipment costs or on the telecommuter supplying their own, compatible equipment, if equipment is needed to perform the job. Such local policies are subject to negotiations on units represented by the union.

Transfer of computers, printers, modems and other data processing equipment from the office to the home residence and back is determined by the unit. Normally, units will make it the responsibility of the individual.

Managers must identify tools the employee will need while working at the alternative workplace and ensure that the participating employee has access to the necessary reference sources and other materials.

Consideration should be given to holding (not surplus) computer equipment that has the technical capability to perform telework tasks as a way of enhancing telework opportunities and reducing costs.

Scope

This guidance applies to all USDA Forest Service employees. The implementation of the Telecommuting Program shall be based on this nationally negotiated agreement. Local units shall have latitude only in negotiating issues that fall outside these nationally established criteria, procedures and standards.

General Policy Guidelines

Telecommuting is not a right. Before a manager can consider a telecommuting request, the manager and employee must examine the job requirements. While some jobs can be performed almost 100 percent offsite, most jobs require a certain amount of time at the office. Jobs that require the worker to perform a daily, hands-on service for others are not adaptable to telecommuting. Management is responsible for deciding if the position is one that is appropriate for off-site work and for examining both the content of the work and the performance of the employee. Because this is a management work option, there is no automatic right of the employee to continue participation in the event of a change of management. However, a successful telecommuting arrangement should not be suspended absent defined, operational or regulatory concerns. If the manager believes the telecommuting arrangement is not working (for example, the employee's performance becomes unsatisfactory or participation interferes with organizational needs), he/she has the right to end an employee's participation with two weeks advanced notice. However, a minimum of 30 calendar days of participation should be allowed to provide employees and management a reasonable period of time to determine the impact of new telecommuting arrangements. The 30-day time period is not necessary for short-term, situational or project-based telecommuting arrangements. Such short-term telecommuting authorizations (typically less than a month) may be granted without a formal agreement.

The employee must submit an initial request for a telecommuting arrangement using the Telecommuting Work Proposal/Agreement (Exhibit 01). A completed Safety Self-Certification and Computer Security Self-Certification form (Exhibit 02, Parts 1 and 2) must also be submitted when a home telework location is being proposed. The Telecommuting Work Proposal/Agreement is submitted by the applicant to management for review and approval. Management shall review the forms and respond, in writing, within ten (10) working days.

Responsibilities

A. Management will:

1. Review and approve, disapprove or approve with modification the Telecommuting Work Proposal/Agreement;
2. Ensure that telecommuting does not burden staff remaining in the office through the inequitable distribution of workload;

3. Develop and amend performance work plans as needed for work performed away from the primary official duty station;
4. Assign appropriate work to be performed at the alternate work site and verify that the telecommuter has the information and equipment necessary to perform the work independently;
5. Ensure that work-related documents in both hard copy and electronic form have been adequately secured within the remote work site; and
6. Periodically evaluate the efficacy of the telecommuting arrangement.

B. Employees will:

1. Complete the Telecommuting Work Proposal/Agreement (Exhibit 01);
2. Complete a Safety Self-Certification and Computer Security Self-Certification form (Exhibits 02, Parts 1 and 2) when a home telework location is being proposed;
3. Observe agreed-upon hours of work in accordance with the approved Telecommuting Work Proposal/Agreement;
4. Maintain a successful level of performance;
5. Observe policies for requesting leave when leave is to be taken;
6. Notify management when they wish to withdraw from the Telecommuting Program;
7. Promptly notify management of any work related accident or injury which occurs at the work site during the course of the scheduled work period;
8. Use Government equipment in conformance with the Agency's Limited Personal Use of Telecommunication Resources and Office Equipment Policy;
9. Ensure that work information in both hard copy and electronic form has been adequately secured; and
10. As appropriate, ensure that dependent care is provided by someone other than the telecommuter during his or her telecommuting schedule. Telecommuting arrangements can provide valuable assistance in the management of work/family schedules, but it is not a substitute for dependent care support.

Guidelines

- A. **Selection Criteria:** Selection of telecommuters is a key activity from both individual and organizational standpoints. The criteria used to select participants will depend upon a number of interrelating issues. Telecommuters are selected from among applicants who generally meet the following guidelines. For units covered by a collective bargaining agreement, the selection criteria for telecommuters may be negotiated by the local parties, as appropriate.

Identifying the Employee

1. The employee has demonstrated self-motivation, independence, and dependability in accomplishing work assignments.
2. The employee has good time management skills.
3. The employee's overall performance evaluation is successful for the last annual rating period.
4. The employee has a clear understanding of the work to be performed.
5. The employee has satisfied alternate work site requirements, including availability of necessary equipment; privacy and lack of personal interruptions; security of sensitive, non-classified data; and confidentiality of Privacy Act information.
6. The employee has received no disciplinary or adverse actions within the preceding twelve (12) month period.
7. The employee does not require close supervision or constant, face-to-face interaction with co-workers to complete assignments.

Identifying the Position

8. Specific work activities are portable and can be performed effectively at an alternate worksite.
9. Performance can be judged either through quality and timeliness of assignments or quantity of tasks completed or a combination of these factors.
10. An essential component of job responsibility consists of reading/processing tasks, e.g., reviewing and processing data, writing reports, formulating written advice or opinion, etc.
11. Face-to-face contact with other employees and clients is predictable or contact can be managed through telephone or e-mail communication.
12. The technology and equipment needed to perform the job off-site is available or can be adjusted for use on the days when the employee is in the primary office. For example, use of photocopier and telefax equipment.
13. Fluctuations in work load can be accommodated in a telecommuting work arrangement;
14. Security and confidentiality of data, including sensitive, non-classified, Privacy Act information, can be adequately assured.
15. Travel requirements for the position have been identified and anticipated.

B. Telecommuting agreements and disputes: Employees are required to obtain the approval of management, in the form of an approved Telecommuting Work Proposal/Agreement, before working at a telework center, at home or at another approved location on a recurring, scheduled basis. A Telecommuting Work Proposal/Agreement is displayed in Exhibit 01. Employees should consider the following when making telecommuting requests:

1. Explain to management how it will positively benefit your unit and address quality of life opportunities.
2. Start off small by suggesting a day or two a week.
3. Be willing to be held accountable and to be self-policing. If you are not self-motivated, off-site work may not suit you.
4. Create a track record of being reliable and producing quality work.
5. Maintain a list of your accomplishments. Particularly those that indicate an ability to work in a more isolated environment.
6. Consider the possible effects on your co-workers and clients. Your off-site work should not impose on others by making their work more difficult.

Where collective bargaining agreements exist, the established grievance procedures will be employed to resolve disputes resulting from the interpretation or implementation of this Telecommuting Program. For employees not covered by the negotiated grievance procedure, the administrative grievance procedure applies.

C. Work schedules: Work away from the office will vary depending upon the individual arrangements between employees and management. However, each telecommuting agreement typically should identify the days the employee will work in the office. This will ensure that the employee is available for occasional face-to-face meetings, access to facilities, etc. Furthermore, successful programs have shown employees need to spend at least some time in the office to minimize isolation and communication problems, facilitate integration of the employee with those in the office, and to facilitate normal management/employee interactions.

To reduce employee isolation, managers should ensure that efforts are made to include telecommuters as part of the team. The telecommuters need to be aware of office developments while they are off-site. Staff meetings should, when practical, be held on days when the telecommuters are scheduled to be in the office and these employees shall be considered equally with non-telecommuters in selection for assignments, performance reviews, or any other employee/employer matters.

Telecommuters' work schedules must identify the days and times the employees will work in each work setting. Work schedules can parallel those in the office or be structured to meet the needs of participating employees and management. The process of establishing work schedules permits periodic adjustments to achieve an optimal schedule suiting organizational and employee requirements. Developing fixed times during the day for management/employee telephone conversations may be helpful to ensure ongoing communication. See **Q. Labor-management relations** for additional information.

A regular schedule makes it easier to stay in touch with colleagues and to be available to clients. Management will approve flexitime schedules in advance to ensure that

employee's time and attendance can be properly certified and to preclude any liability for premium or overtime pay.

Employees working under an approved telecommuting agreement will not be excused from working because workers at their official duty station are dismissed due to an emergency, if the emergency or dismissal does not impact the work being performed at the alternative work site. If an emergency occurs at the telework site that impacts the employee's ability to perform official duties, he/she must immediately notify management. The manager may direct the employee to another work site, grant administrative leave when appropriate, or the employee will make appropriate leave arrangements. See **E. Time and attendance #4** for additional information.

Care must be taken not to approve, formulate or change any schedule that is inconsistent with the provisions or procedures of any applicable collective bargaining or negotiated agreement or the established hours of operation of the unit. A schedule of off-site work hours must be established by management prior to the employee working off-site. During off-site hours, the employee must perform work at a pre-determined and agency-approved site (e.g., home, satellite facility). Absences from the alternative work site (e.g., visits on official business to attend meetings) must be coordinated with management at the earliest time practicable. See **E. Time and attendance** for additional information.

D. Position description and performance management

1. **Position descriptions.** Changes to position descriptions normally will not be required, unless the telecommuting arrangement changes the actual position duties or the position description is not up-to-date. Management should ensure that outdated or nonessential functions are removed and include modifications to management controls or work environment factors.
2. **Performance standards.** Critical elements and performance standards must have clearly defined performance requirements that are measurable and results oriented. The standards must provide a reasonable basis for measuring performance. Explicit and objective norms for work output should be based on experience with those required and sustained in the office and monitored through scheduled progress reports. If this is not possible, establish measures in terms of quantity and quality norms developed jointly by management and the employee and monitored through scheduled progress reporting.

E. Time and attendance

1. **Hours of Duty.** Employees may work standard, flexible, or compressed schedules, depending upon the agreement between the employee and management. The work-at-home day(s) is selected by management and the employee. Normally, it is recommended that no more than three work-at-home days per week be allowed. Management has the discretion to allow more than three days per week of telecommuting to meet operational requirements or employee needs. Those employees authorized to work a flexible schedule may earn and use credit hours when working under an approved telecommuting agreement.
2. **Leave.** The policies for requesting annual leave, sick leave, or leave without pay remain unchanged. The employee is responsible for requesting leave in advance and keeping management informed of leave usage.
3. **Certification and control of time and attendance.** Proper monitoring and certification of employee work time is critical to the success of the program.

Management must report time and attendance to ensure that employees are paid only for work performed and that absences from scheduled tours of duty are accounted for correctly.

4. **Administrative leave, dismissals, emergency closings.** Although a variety of circumstances may affect individual situations, the principles governing administrative leave, dismissals, and closings remain unchanged. The ability to conduct work (and the nature of any impediments), whether at home or at the office, determines when an employee may be excused from duty. For example, if the employee is working at home, and the main office closes, normally the telecommuter will continue working at home. If, however, the telecommuter's office of record does not open on any given day due to inclement weather, fire or other emergency or circumstance, teleworkers are not required to work regardless of whether the closure affects their ability to perform their assigned work. If the employee's electricity fails while working at home, management may grant administrative leave. When an employee knows in advance of a situation that would preclude working at home, either time in the office or leave should be scheduled. See **C. Work Schedules** for additional information.

- F. **Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA).** The existing rules in title 5 U.S.C., and the FLSA governing overtime also apply to telecommuting arrangements. Overtime is time worked at official duties in excess of the scheduled tour of duty that is ordered and approved by management. It is the responsibility of management to regulate and control the use of overtime. Employees are responsible for requesting, in advance, approval to work in excess of their normal hours of duty. This is particularly important when employees are working at a remote site without direct management oversight.

Managers must ensure that only the work for which it intends to make payment is performed. Since management is not on the scene, FLSA overtime (or potential liability for FLSA overtime) could be hard to control if clear directions are not provided to participating employees.

Management must communicate work rules and monitor work activity. Non-exempt telecommuters who work in excess of the hours approved by managers to receive compensation may be removed from the program. Furthermore, the Telecommuting Work Proposal/Agreement will prohibit working overtime that has not been approved in advance by management.

Additionally, if employees request management approval first and the work schedule is appropriate given the nature of the work being performed and the level of interaction with the office that is required, employees can extend their work hours to accrue religious compensatory time. Employees must also fulfill all the requirements for eligibility for religious compensatory time.

- G. **Workers' compensation.** Telecommuters are covered by the Federal Tort Claims Act or the Federal Employees Compensation Act (FECA) and qualify for continuation of pay or workers' compensation for on-the-job injury or occupational illness. Management's signature on the request for compensation attests only to what management can reasonably know, whether the event occurred at a conventional work site or at an alternative work site (e.g., home) during official duty. Under normal circumstances, management often is not present when an employee sustains an injury. Employees, in all situations, bear responsibility for informing management of an injury at the earliest time possible. They must also provide details to the Department of Labor when filing a claim. The Federal equivalent of workers' compensation limits recovery by an employee injured while on duty to reasonable amounts. Management must ensure that claims of this type are brought to the

H. Pay and Travel Issues

1. **Duty station.** For pay and travel purposes, the “official duty station” is the employee’s official office of record.
 2. **Special salary rates.** The employee’s official duty station serves as the basis for determining special salary rates.
 3. **Premium pay.** The normal rules apply for night differentials, and Sunday and holiday pay whether work is accomplished at the conventional or alternate worksite. Official work schedules determine the entitlement to premium pay.
- I. Incident (Fire) Availability.* Authorization to telecommute does not relieve the employee of the responsibility to respond to emergency situations nor does it relieve management of its responsibility to exercise due diligence in contacting telecommuters for emergency assignments for which they are qualified. An agreed upon contact procedure should be included in the Telecommuting Work Proposal/Agreement (See Item 11), when applicable.

J. Work Facilities

1. **Home office space.** Telecommuters should have a designated workspace or work station for performance of their work-at-home duties. Requirements will vary depending on the nature of the work and the equipment needed to perform the work. At a minimum, an employee should be able to easily communicate by telephone with management during the work-at-home day.

Each participating employee shall complete and sign the Safety and Computer Security Self-Certification form (Exhibit 02, Parts 1 and 2), and submit it with the completed Telecommuting Work Proposal/Agreement form, to certify that the home workspace meets the safety and computer security standards specified therein. Employees are responsible for ensuring their homes comply with these standards.

Home utility costs associated with working at home are not paid by the Agency. Potential savings to the employee resulting from reduced commuting, meals, etc., may offset any incidental increase in utility expenses. Exceptions apply only where the personal expense directly benefits the government, e.g., business-related long distance calls on the employee’s personal phone.

2. **GSA-Sponsored Telecenter Workstations.** In this telework arrangement management leases a workstation, directly from the Telecenter in question, for the employee’s use. The employee should visit the Telecenter in question, obtain the necessary forms for leasing a workstation and information on the associated

costs, and follow the established procurement procedures for requesting lease of a Telecenter workstation. The Telecenter Director can provide tours of the center, advise employees on the process for obtaining a workstation, and actively assist in doing so. More information on the Telecenters is available at GSA's [Interagency Telework/Telecommuting Site](#).

3. **Other Work Space.** Management establishes an agreement with the telework applicant to use other available office space and equipment in a location away from the employee's assigned office. For employees represented by a Union, such proposals would likely be subject to negotiations.

K. Telecommunications and Equipment

1. **Telephones.** For official government business only and specific to telecommuting, Federal agencies may use appropriated funds to pay for telephone installation and basic service in private residences.

Whenever possible, employees will use government calling cards for long distance official calls. Units may also pay for the use of the employee's personal phone for business related long-distance phone calls. Current GSA regulations (41 CFR, 101-7i) allow for reimbursement of expenses incurred as a result of official duties on SF-1164, including telephone call expenses approved by the Agency.

2. **Computers, government-owned equipment, etc.** Telecommuters can use personal or Agency owned/leased hardware and software to fulfill telework requirements. With the prior written approval of management employees can add non-government owned or licensed hardware or software to the government owned or leased computer.

Government-owned property, including computers and other telecommunications equipment, may be removed from the Agency and used by employees in their private residences provided the equipment is used in conformance with the Telecommuting Agreement and the agency policy on limited personal use of telecommunications and computer equipment. The government retains ownership and control of hardware, software, and data. In these situations, the government is responsible for maintenance, repair, and replacement of such equipment. The employee must notify management immediately following a malfunction of Government-owned equipment. If repairs are extensive, the employee may be asked to report to the main office until equipment is usable.

Note: *If government loaned equipment is unsecured and consequently damaged by non-employees (for example, dependents of the employee) employees may be held liable for the repair or replacement of the equipment, software, etc., to the same extent they are presently held to when loaned equipment is damaged due to their negligence.*

3. **Cost factors:**
 - a. For some employees the up-front costs will be minimal or non-existent. More commonly, the employee will need access to specific equipment and/or will use the telephone extensively on telecommuting days. The following types of up-front and on-going expenses may be incurred by the agency:
 - i. Long distance telephone charges;

- ii. Telephone usage charges (other than long distance);
- iii. Computer or typewriter assigned to the employee's home;
- iv. Computer software;
- v. Modem and possible additional computer usage charges;
- vi. Modifications to the central computer to allow employees to dial in;
- vii. Modifications to office phone system to allow automatic rollover of calls to telework location;
- viii. Equipment maintenance and repair charges;
- ix. Remote technical assistance; and
- x. Replacement of damaged or lost equipment.

b. **Employee expenses** may include:

- i. Office furniture (e.g., desk, chair);
- ii. Answering machine; and
- iii. Additional electrical outlets.

c. **Costs to establish and maintain** a satellite facility are similar to those for any field office and may include:

- i. Rent;
- ii. Telecommunications lines and equipment;
- iii. Utilities; and
- iv. Photocopier and other office machines, furniture, etc.

L. **Computer security:** The employee will certify, using the Computer Security Self-Certification form (Exhibit 02, Part 2), that he/she will adhere to the following guidelines to protect against the unauthorized use of the telework computer equipment and electronic files:

1. Do not leave computer unattended while logged-on.
2. Dial-up telecommunication access to government computers presents special security concerns. A combination of physical controls, unique user identifiers, passwords, terminal identifiers, access control software, and strict adherence to security procedures is required to protect the information from unauthorized access. Ensure that personal ID's, passwords, access codes, etc., that are assigned are kept confidential. Do not save passwords as part of log-on procedures.
3. Telecommuters need to protect sensitive government information stored on magnetic media of workplace computers when the computers are repaired or serviced. Telecommuters should seek the advice of management when the servicing of equipment that contains sensitive information is anticipated.
4. Telecommuters must ensure adequate property management procedures are adhered to when transferring government owned or leased equipment to alternate work sites, to Agency facilities or other approved locations

M. **Workspace:** Employees working under an approved Telecommuting Agreement may be required to give up their individually assigned workspace in their official duty station. For bargaining unit employees, this change in working conditions is subject to local negotiations.

- N. **Privacy Act, Sensitive or Classified Data:** Decisions regarding the proper use and handling of sensitive data, as well as records subject to the Privacy Act, are delegated to management who permits employees to work at home. Off-site access to sensitive data may be permitted provided that the security for such access is adequate.

Care must be taken to ensure that records subject to the Privacy Act or sensitive data are not disclosed to anyone except to those who are authorized access to such information in order to perform their duties. When records subject to the Privacy Act are maintained or used by employees working at home or at other remote locations, installations should revise the appropriate record system notices to indicate that the off-site system location is authorized.

- O. **Dependent Care Costs:** Generally, telecommuting will not significantly reduce dependent care costs. Telecommuting is not intended to serve as a substitute for dependent care. However, telecommuting may reduce dependent care costs by reducing the number of hours of care necessary due to time saved commuting. In some cases, it could eliminate the need for before or after school daycare.

The opportunity to participate in the program is offered with the intent that it is the responsibility of the employee to ensure that a proper work environment is maintained (e.g., dependent care arrangements are made so as to not interfere with the work, personal disruptions such as non-business telephone calls and visitors are kept to a minimum, etc.). The employee and his/her family should understand that the home office is just that, a space set aside for the employee to work. Family responsibilities must not interfere (to the extent they are controllable) with work time at home.

- P. **Tax benefits:** Generally, an employee who uses a portion of his or her home does not qualify for any Federal tax deductions. However, employees should consult their tax advisors or the Internal Revenue Service for information on tax laws and interpretations that address their specific circumstances.

- Q. **Labor-management relations:** Changes in work schedule, tours and working conditions have implications relative to existing collective bargaining agreements that managers and employees need to be aware of as they discuss and finalize telecommuting agreements. These negotiated agreements must be followed when bargaining unit employees are involved. For units represented by a Union, the establishment of a local telecommuting/telework program must include Union notification and should be addressed in locally negotiated agreements.

- R. **Pitfalls to avoid:** The following are examples of some of the common pitfalls and traps to avoid:

1. Managers plan important meetings during scheduled work at home days.

Alternative: Schedule the meeting on appropriate days or set up a conference call.

2. Co-workers don't know when the employee will be in the office. There is a general sense that the employee is "never around."

Alternative: Post a schedule when each employee is in the office and when they are out (either at home or on approved leave).

3. Managers and employees do not have a clear understanding of work expectations.

Alternative: Define work expectations in advance to avoid misunderstanding.

4. Co-workers are not able or unclear as to how and when to contact the employee (and are sometimes actively discouraged). There is a reluctance to call employees at home on their telecommuting days.

Alternative: Provide staff with the telecommuter's remote office phone number. Encourage staff to call employee on telecommuting days. Management should set an example by calling employees on their home work days and insisting that others continue to transact business with employees at home.

5. Employees are reluctant to leave the phone on their telecommuting days, even to use the restroom or take a break, because someone who called might think they are not working.

Alternative: Use an answering machine to take messages during your absences. Return calls immediately upon your return.

6. Employees run into technical problems with their computers and no one is available to assist them.

Alternative: Establish procedures for call-in troubleshooting.

7. Telecommuting is joked about as "goofing off". Telecommuting days are referred to by co-workers as "days off".

Alternative: Explain or distribute benefits of telecommuting to other staff members. Make visible the work products that the telecommuter produces while working at home.

8. Employee feels a sense of isolation and loss of interaction with co-workers.

Alternative: Establish arrangements where the employee reports to the office a minimum of two days a week. Encourage active communication via E-mail, voice mail, and telephone between telecommuters and in-office staff.

9. Home/work boundaries are blurred.

Alternative: Keep your office separate from your living area by placing it in a separate room as far removed from the living areas as possible. Keep a definite schedule of work time and personal time and adhere to it.

10. The unit incurs additional expenses associated with the provision of equipment and services such as telephone charges for computer connections and long-distance call.

Alternative: Weigh additional costs against current and projected organizational needs. Factor in office space savings, potential recruitment savings, savings in training funds, and other "bottom line" savings to the organization. Also consider such factors as increased employee satisfaction and productivity; environmental considerations;

and the opportunity to assign injured, recuperating or physically limited employees to productive work.

S. Training

11. Training in telecommuting policies and guidelines, as well as personal and occupational aspects of telecommuting arrangements is recommended but not required.
 - a. **Employee topics** include:
 - i. Expectations of personal responsibility, accountability, time management, and self-discipline.
 - ii. Communicating with management, progress reporting, time management, deadlines, contact and meetings with co-workers, and support personnel.
 - iii. Ways to avoid isolation, family issues, finding the best home and office work schedule, image and self-esteem.
 - b. **Management topics** include:
 - iv. Managing for results, establishing quality and quantity norms, planning, scheduling and tracking assignments and milestones.
 - v. Administration of work schedules, time and attendance and leave.
 - vi. Management expectations on communicating with the telecommuter.