

UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

Washington, DC, Area Dismissal and Closure Procedures



A Message from the Acting Director of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management

As we begin the 2015-2016 winter season, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) wants to take this opportunity to remind Federal departments and agencies of the *Washington, DC, Area Dismissal and Closure Procedures (Procedures)* guide. These *Procedures* reflect the principle that the Federal Government's vital business must continue without compromising the safety of our employees and the general public. Although the *Procedures* are typically issued in winter, the announcements are applicable for any emergency or significant event that causes a disruption inside the "Washington Capital Beltway."

During the past few years, OPM has consulted with an interagency working group of human resources specialists, Chief Human Capital Officers (CHCOs), and national labor organizations to ensure that the *Procedures* reflect the needs of the human resources community. OPM has also coordinated with Federal, State, and local emergency management and transportation officials to ensure that each announcement supports the needs of the emergency situation. This year OPM is not recommending changes to the *Procedures* or the operating status announcements, but we would still like to highlight a couple of important topics for both agencies and employees.

Telework Policies and Procedures

Telework has become a standard human resources tool in the *Procedures* that enables a greater number of Federal employees to work during emergency situations. Agencies should continue to incorporate telework arrangements into their agency emergency planning so that employees will be able to telework during emergency situations, thereby allowing the Federal Government to maintain productivity and ensure continuity of operations. Given recent agency actions to improve cybersecurity practices, we strongly encourage agencies to take steps to ensure that telework-ready employees are prepared to effectively telework and access agency IT systems and networks, as may be necessary, should an emergency or weather condition so warrant.

Communicating Expectations

Federal agencies and employees in the Washington, DC, area must be prepared to respond immediately to an emergency situation. OPM's operating status announcements are only effective if each employee understands what the announcement means and how to react. Every OPM announcement should be accompanied by specific agency procedures in continuity of operations plans, written telework agreements, and/or collective bargaining agreements, as consistent with law. These agency procedures will allow employees to know what is expected of them when OPM changes the operating status.

Employees must understand which human resources flexibilities are available to them during specific agency operating procedures, such as unscheduled telework, unscheduled leave, leave without pay, alternative work schedule day off, etc. In an emergency situation, timing is crucial. Employees must be able to act under their own agency's procedures when unscheduled telework or unscheduled leave are options, or when provisions in agency telework agreements requiring employees to telework when the Federal Government is closed have been triggered.

Importance of Following OPM Operating Status Announcements

In order to enhance safety and productivity, it is essential that covered Federal agencies and employees follow the *Procedures* for Governmentwide emergencies or special events that create a disruption in the Washington metropolitan area. The operating status announcements are intended to apply to employees working in all Executive agencies with offices located inside the “Washington Capital Beltway.” In the event of an area-wide work disruption, agencies should avoid taking independent action because changes in the commuting hours of Federal employees can result in dramatic disruption of the highway and mass transit systems. Following OPM’s operating status announcements and policies will allow for coordination with municipal and regional officials, and will reduce disruption of the highway and transit systems. This will both reduce traffic congestion and ensure that affected employees are treated as consistently as possible.

For More Information

Announcements on the status of Government operations in the Washington, DC, area will be available at <http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/snow-dismissal-procedures/current-status>. Recorded messages on operating status also will be provided by OPM’s Office of Communications on (202) 606-1900. Additionally, the OPM Alert mobile app allows employees to instantly view the current and active operating status and to sign up for optional push notifications when status changes occur. Please visit <http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/snow-dismissal-procedures/mobile-app> for more information.

Thank you for your cooperation and support as we continue to work together to both ensure the safety of our employees and the continuity of our Government.

Beth F. Cobert
Acting Director

Washington, DC, Area Dismissal and Closure Procedures

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I. Introduction

The following procedures apply to situations that prevent significant numbers of Federal employees who work inside the Washington Capital Beltway (referred to as the Washington, DC, area, for purposes of these *Procedures*) from reporting to the office on time or remaining at the office for the full workday and for situations which require Federal offices to close, including emergencies, severe weather conditions, natural disasters, and other incidents causing disruptions of Government operations. For continuity of operations, it is important for certain Federal Government operations to continue to function, even when Federal offices are closed.

A. Geographic Area of Application of Emergency Procedures

The *Procedures* apply to employees in all Executive agencies with offices located inside the “Washington Capital Beltway” (the highway that circles the Nation’s capital). In addition, some agencies may decide to apply these same procedures to facilities located in the portions of the Counties and jurisdictions that are outside of the Capital Beltway, but adjacent to the District of Columbia (i.e., Montgomery and Prince George’s Counties in Maryland; Arlington and Fairfax Counties; and the independent cities of Alexandria, Fairfax, and Falls Church in Virginia). However, other agencies may decide to develop separate plans for these facilities, since Federal offices in areas outside the Capital Beltway may be subject to different weather and traffic conditions than those inside the Beltway. In very rare circumstances, OPM may issue guidelines affecting agency facilities outside the Washington Capital Beltway. Note, however, that OPM’s *Procedures* do not apply to employees of the legislative branch, judicial branch, U.S. Postal Service, the government of the District of Columbia, or private sector entities, including contractors.

For weather-related situations in certain large metropolitan areas outside of the Washington, DC, area, the Federal Executive Boards provide up-to-date, accurate, and consistent information, such as from the National Weather Service, to their local Federal agency leaders to assist them in making informed decisions on the appropriate operating status for their Federal agency employees in those areas. Each local Federal agency head makes workforce status decisions for his or her agency employees and should report that workforce status decision to his or her agency Headquarters. While the operating status of the Federal Government in the Washington, DC, area can be found at <http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/snow-dismissal-procedures/current-status>, Federal employees in geographic areas outside of the Washington, DC, area should check with their own agency regarding the operating status of their duty station.

As a part of OPM’s role to prepare all Federal employees for emergency situations, OPM reminds agencies to provide consistent terminology across the Federal Government. For example, OPM strongly encourages all agencies to use the term “unscheduled leave” in place of other terminology.

B. Importance of Following OPM Announcements for Washington, DC, Area Emergencies

In order to enhance safety and productivity, it is essential that covered Federal agencies and employees follow the *Procedures* for Governmentwide emergencies or special events that create a disruption in the Washington metropolitan area. The operating status announcements apply to employees working in all Executive agencies with offices located inside the “Washington Capital Beltway.” These policies are based on the principle that the Federal Government’s vital business must be carried out without compromising the safety of our employees and the general public. In the event of area-wide work disruptions, agencies should avoid independent action because changes in the commuting hours of Federal employees can result in dramatic disruption of the highway and mass transit systems. Following OPM’s announcements and policies will allow for coordination with municipal and regional officials, and will reduce disruption of the highway and transit systems. This will both reduce traffic congestion and ensure that affected employees are treated as consistently as possible.

For an agency-specific emergency, agencies must follow their internal agency emergency operating procedures. Agencies possess the authority to release employees and/or close individual facilities to the public on a localized, building-by-building basis, and agencies should exercise this authority during localized emergencies such as a building fire or limited flooding.

Agencies should inform and remind their employees at least annually about the *Procedures*. In an emergency situation, timing is very important. Employees should follow OPM operating status announcements and any additional agency-specific procedures when an emergency occurs. Employees must follow their own agency’s procedures for notifying supervisors or other agency officials when unscheduled telework or unscheduled leave are options.

C. Importance of Telework during Dismissal or Closure

The Federal Government uses telework as a means to allow Federal employees to complete their work at an approved alternative worksite. The Telework Enhancement Act of 2010 (the Act) defines “telework” or “teleworking” as a work flexibility arrangement under which an employee performs the duties and responsibilities of his or her position, and other authorized activities, from an approved worksite other than the location from which the employee would otherwise work. Agencies should incorporate telework arrangements into their agency emergency planning so that employees who would prefer to telework in the event of such an emergency, and who could perform duties from an alternate location, may do so.

Telework continues to enable a greater number of Federal employees to work during emergency situations. Recognizing our evolving use of technology, telework allows the Federal Government to maximize operational efficiency to the extent practicable without compromising the safety of our employees and the general public during heavy snow accumulation, significant road closures due to various events, and other emergency situations. In emergencies, OPM will make announcements to the public and the media on the status of operations for Federal agencies in the Washington, DC, area. Sections II and III of these *Procedures* provide additional guidance on the use of telework for dismissal and closure procedures.

Emergency Planning

The Act requires all agencies to incorporate telework arrangements into their Continuity of Operations (COOP) plans. In preparation for COOP emergencies, agencies should have telework policies and agreements in place that encourage employees to participate in telework and provide employees who participate in telework with instructions, procedures, and expectations in the event they need to respond to a COOP event. Agencies should ensure that the equipment, technology, and technical support have been tested; that employees are comfortable with technology and communications methods; and that supervisors and managers are comfortable managing a dispersed workgroup.

Requirement for Written Telework Agreement

The Act requires all agencies to incorporate telework arrangements into their Continuity of Operations (COOP) plans. In preparation for events that trigger an agency's continuity of government plan, the agency should have procedures and understandings in place that instruct COOP team members how to deploy (including telework agreements if a member will be deploying to his or her home). Similarly, in preparation for other emergencies, agencies should have procedures and understandings in place that instruct emergency employees whether they must report to the regular worksite in the event of an emergency. If the work could be performed from an alternative location, they should determine whether the employee would prefer to have the option of teleworking, and, if so, make sure a telework agreement is in place. Finally, as a matter of good planning for and enhanced productivity during emergencies, OPM encourages agencies to incorporate into telework agreements a provision requiring the employee to telework when the office is closed -- for whatever reason. Employees who participate in telework should be provided with instructions, procedures, and expectations during office closures. Agencies should ensure that the equipment, technology, and technical support have been tested; that employees are comfortable with technology and communications methods; and that supervisors and managers are comfortable managing a dispersed workgroup.

The agreement provides the framework for the discussion that needs to take place between the supervisor and the employee about work expectations and operational procedures. The parameters of telework agreements are laid out by the agency policy and/or collective bargaining agreement (as consistent with law) and typically address the days and times the employee is regularly scheduled to telework or permitted to telework on an intermittent or situational (ad hoc) basis, as applicable. In addition, agencies must provide interactive training to ensure that employees and supervisors have the skills to engage effectively in telework.

No Coercion

Employee participation in the telework program is voluntary. An agency may not compel an employee to participate in telework, even if some or all of the duties of the position can be performed at an alternative location. Therefore, an agency should never force an employee who does not wish to telework to sign a telework agreement to avoid providing excused absence to that employee on a day when Federal offices are closed. Similarly, an agency should never permit an employee who is not eligible to telework to enter into a telework agreement, regardless of the motivation.

Ensure Employees Are Telework-Ready

OPM strongly encourages agencies to continue reviewing their current telework arrangements and establish written agreements with all employees who are scheduled or eligible to telework (i.e., telework-ready) at any time during the year. Special attention should be paid to employees who will telework only on an occasional, situational (ad hoc) basis so that they are prepared to telework during events or circumstances that disrupt or prevent commuting or reporting to the office. The key to the successful use of situational (ad hoc) telework is an effective telework program in which telework-ready employees regularly practice teleworking.

Communication of Expectations for Unscheduled Telework

Agency telework policies and telework agreements should specify whether employees are expected or permitted to work from home during emergency situations on days that they are not regularly scheduled to telework. OPM strongly encourages agencies to permit telework-ready employees to use unscheduled telework on any day OPM makes an unscheduled telework announcement. With regard to unscheduled telework, the written telework agreement should specifically address telework expectations when the Federal Government announces (1) unscheduled leave/unscheduled telework or (2) delayed arrival. In addition, employees who are already performing unscheduled telework should know that they are expected to complete their normal workday when OPM announces an early or immediate departure after the workday has begun unless the reason for the departure impacts the teleworkers as well.

Agencies should avoid creating unnecessary barriers for telework-ready employees when unscheduled telework is announced. Since the unscheduled telework option maintains productivity and continuity of operations, OPM strongly believes the best course of action is for agencies to be as accommodating as possible to telework-ready employees who wish to perform unscheduled telework. Employees must follow their own agency's procedures when unscheduled telework is an option.

OPM recognizes that in rare circumstances, an agency may find it necessary to require a non-emergency employee to report for an assignment that requires presence at the worksite (e.g., providing a presentation or performing administrative duties at a pre-scheduled conference). This should not be a last-minute surprise, but a special work circumstance that both the supervisor and employee know about, discuss, and plan in advance as the special work requirement evolves.

Finally, agencies should remind employees who elect to perform unscheduled telework that they must have an appropriate amount of work to complete during the workday at home. If an employee does not have enough work, he or she must either take unscheduled leave for the entire workday or use a combination of unscheduled leave and unscheduled telework to account for hours not worked.

Uniform Telework Policies and Procedures

For decades, certain Federal employees have been expected to work during emergencies to provide continuity of Government functions. OPM introduced the unscheduled

telework announcement in 2010 after the “Snowmagedon” episodes to provide improved continuity during emergencies by encouraging agencies to cover expectations about work when Federal offices are closed in telework agreements, so that as many Federal employees as possible could be ready to continue the work on which our Nation depends during such an emergency. Generally, telework provides employees with flexibility to balance work and personal needs and decreases traffic both generally and at times when normal traffic might exacerbate a hazardous situation. Telework is thus a means to keep employees safe during weather emergencies and help reduce traffic congestion on a day-to-day basis. Telework is also a powerful tool to provide agencies with the resources they need to continue accomplishing their missions during emergencies. Telework is voluntary, but a written agreement which outlines expectations is required before an employee can participate in telework. It is this agreement that provides the opportunity for enhancing productivity during an emergency event. In the case of unscheduled telework, continuity of operations are supported and enhanced significantly when employees with written telework agreements continue the work of the Federal Government.

Unscheduled telework is now a standard human resources tool in the *Procedures*. It has been increased by the Telework Enhancement Act of 2010, which requires that all agencies incorporate telework into their Continuity of Operations Plans (COOP). Increased use of unscheduled telework has enhanced our capabilities during severe weather, special events and other emergency situations.

When Federal offices are closed, OPM’s operating status announcement requires that two types of telework-ready employees will perform work: (1) employees already scheduled to perform telework on the effective day of the announcement and (2) employees required to perform telework according to their written telework agreements when the Federal Government is closed. However, there is a third category of teleworkers – (3) those who are telework-ready but are neither scheduled to work on the day of an OPM closure announcement or required to work on that day according to their written telework agreement. Currently, group (3) may be the largest category of telework employees. OPM urges that agencies migrate towards a more comprehensive telework policy by incorporating group (3) employees into group (2) (i.e., employees required to perform telework when the Federal Government is closed). Note that written telework agreements, consistent with agency policies and subject to any collective bargaining agreements (as consistent with law), must be in place before requiring telework for both (1) and (2).

To ensure for the continued migration of group (3), agencies should develop new telework policies (if not already in place). Agencies can begin by reviewing their current policies and procedures to determine if unscheduled telework has been operating toward that end and make any needed corrections. Then, individual written telework agreements should be implemented to reflect the new telework policies. The goal is to have full use of telework-ready employees, for both essential and nonessential functions, to support continuity of operations on any day when Federal offices are closed. Agencies and employees must remember that telework is voluntary. While employees' capacity to telework is a critical human resources tool when Federal offices are closed, telework is primarily a valuable work-life flexibility used by employees throughout the year, helping

to balance work and personal needs (and a means of reducing traffic that is attractive to employees).

It is important to note that Federal offices will be closed when it is unsafe for employees to commute; however, employees who can telework in the safety of their own homes generally should no longer be granted excused absence. The long-term focus should remain on telework-employees having the ability to work from home year-round and not on the narrow issue of who receives excused absence during a closure. Agencies should consider exercising their authority to grant excused absence to teleworking employees on a case-by-case basis when it is not possible to telework for some or all of the workday (e.g., power outages or network connection problems that prevent telework) when Federal offices are closed.

Communication of Expectations for Telework-Ready Employees When Federal Offices Are Closed

Agencies' telework policies and telework agreements must specify whether employees are required to work from home when OPM issues an operating announcement saying that Federal offices are closed. OPM encourages agencies to require telework-ready employees who are permitted to use unscheduled telework to be required to telework on closure days. This includes employees who are regularly scheduled to telework on the day of a closure and those who were not scheduled in advance to telework but are required to do so by virtue of their telework agreement.

To be able to telework effectively on a day when the Federal Government closes, employees must be able to practice—either performing telework on a day when an operating announcement is made for unscheduled telework, periodically throughout the year (e.g., at least once a month), or on a regular basis (e.g., once a week or more). A telework employee must be able to practice teleworking to be effective when OPM issues a Federal closure announcement.

If an employee is required to telework on a day when the Federal Government is closed and the employee's telework site is impacted by the emergency, agencies may exercise their authority to grant excused absence to that affected employee. Decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis (e.g., when power outages or network connection problems prevent telework). On closure days, agencies should exercise situational awareness, understanding that the employee's telework location may also be impacted by the emergency situation. Thus, it may be appropriate to provide excused absence for a part or all of the day.

D. Strategic Use of OPM Operating Status Announcements

OPM's goal is to ensure the safety of Federal employees and the general public while maintaining continuity of operations. To achieve this goal, OPM is committed to making operating status decisions as far in advance as feasible and to using these announcements strategically to reduce uncertainty and minimize demands on transportation infrastructure.

E. Agency-Specific Announcements

For agency-specific emergencies, OPM continues to believe that each agency is in the best position to determine the appropriate course of action. For example, power outages or flooding in a particular building could affect one or several facilities without requiring all agencies to take action. Agencies have the authority to release employees and/or close individual facilities on a localized, building-by-building basis. Each agency should have a method for communicating and updating operating status announcements to employees as part of the agency's emergency procedures.

F. OPM May Issue Additional Operating Status Announcements

Over the years, the Washington, DC, area has experienced a wide variety of weather phenomena including historic amounts of snowfall, ice storms, earthquakes, and hurricanes. These events have shown us that no two emergencies are exactly alike and that OPM's operating status announcements may not always fit a particular emergency. Therefore, as a general principle, agencies should be aware that OPM may need to issue a new or hybrid operating status announcement and should be prepared for OPM to do so at any time, depending on the particulars of the emergency, for the safety of employees and continuity of Government operations. OPM will always attempt to use the published operating status announcements.

II. Communicating Expectations

Each agency must clearly communicate expectations to supervisors and employees in preparation for days on which OPM announces a change in the operating status for the Federal Government in the Washington, DC, area. It is important that each employee understand what an OPM operating status announcement means and how to react. This requires agencies to update their internal policies, including COOP plans and telework agreements, to reflect employee requirements under emergency operating procedures.

The agency must also provide guidance on human resources flexibilities that are available to employees during specific agency operating procedures—e.g., unscheduled telework, unscheduled leave, leave without pay, alternative work schedule (AWS) day off. In an emergency situation, timing is very important. Employees must understand and be able to act immediately under their own agency's procedures when unscheduled telework or unscheduled leave are options, or when telework agreement provisions requiring them to work when the Federal Government is closed have been triggered.

A. Designation of an Emergency Employee

As the President's advisor on human resources policies, OPM advises agencies to designate in advance those emergency employees who are critical to agency operations (including security and infrastructure) in dismissal or closure situations and who will be expected to work. Because of the diversity in agency missions and employee occupations/skills, the variable nature of the emergencies, weather and geographic conditions specific to duty locations, and many other factors, OPM does not provide standard Governmentwide definitions of emergency employees. Each agency is in the best position and is responsible for determining its own needs. Agency heads (or their

designees, as applicable) are responsible for making such determinations based on the agency's unique mission requirements and/or circumstances.

Emergency Employee

The designation of emergency employees may vary according to the particular nature of an exigency and may include any employees who are part of an agency's emergency response plans and COOP plans. Such designations should be communicated to the affected employees at least annually (preferably in writing and well in advance) so employees can be prepared to support and sustain agency operations.

Emergency employees are expected to report to or remain at their worksite in dismissal or closure situations unless otherwise directed by their agencies. In rare events, an agency may determine that circumstances justify granting excused absence to an emergency employee. An agency may grant a reasonable amount of excused absence to an emergency employee who is unable to report for work or faces a personal hardship. For example, factors such as distance, availability of public transportation, or health/medical limitations may be considered. When Government operations are disrupted and offices are closed for an extended period of time, an agency may determine that changing circumstances require non-emergency employees to report for work. Consequently, each agency should establish a procedure for notifying and recalling these employees. OPM advises agencies to identify non-emergency employees who are expected to remain in contact with their agencies at all times during dismissal or closure situations to maintain continuity readiness. Such employees may be called to work during emergencies dealing with national security, extended emergencies, or other unique situations. Agencies should anticipate the emergency situations in which such employees will be expected to report for work at a regular worksite or alternative worksite and the circumstances under which they will be permitted to telework, if they prefer, and should notify affected employees of this policy. Agencies may issue communications devices and other equipment to these employees to facilitate contact in emergency situations.

Non-Emergency Employees

When OPM issues an operating status announcement that includes unscheduled telework/unscheduled leave, and Federal offices are otherwise open, OPM expects that non-emergency employees will be empowered to make their decisions and simply notify their agencies of their status for the day. This is the norm. However, OPM recognizes that in rare circumstances, an agency may find it necessary to require a non-emergency employee to report for an assignment that requires presence at the worksite (e.g., providing a presentation or performing administrative duties at a pre-scheduled conference). This should not be a last-minute surprise, but a special work circumstance that both the supervisor and employee know about, discuss, and plan in advance as the special work requirement evolves. This does not change the status of a non-emergency employee to an emergency employee, and would never require such an employee to report to work when Federal offices are closed, but recognizes that when the absence of an employee would have an adverse impact on a special, pre-planned event, and Federal offices remain open, the employee will make every effort possible to report to the worksite, as long as it is safe to do so. OPM strongly encourages agencies to communicate expectations explicitly to its employees through internal agency policies,

instructions, notices, procedures, telework agreements and/or collective bargaining agreements to avoid any confusion on a day when a change to the OPM operating status announcement is made.

B. Telework-Ready Employees

Telework is now a standard human resources tool in our *Washington, DC, Area Dismissal and Closure Procedures*. The Telework Enhancement Act of 2010 requires that all agencies incorporate telework into their COOP Plans. OPM advises agencies to make telework arrangements a standard part of all agency emergency planning to ensure the Federal Government is well positioned to carry out its essential functions for continuity of operations. Employees' telework agreements should spell out whether employees are expected to work from home or an alternative site on days when the Federal Government has announced a change in the operating status for the Washington, DC, area and whether they may opt for unscheduled telework (even when offices are not closed) when OPM announces that conditions warrant the use of that arrangement.

To the extent it is otherwise appropriate under the Telework Enhancement Act, OPM strongly encourages agencies to maintain a viable telework-ready workforce that can be directed to telework when Federal offices are closed. This requires encouraging employees to enter into written telework agreements, communicating expectations before an emergency situation occurs, and practicing and testing equipment and procedures regularly throughout the year, not just teleworking during emergencies that may occur only infrequently over time (i.e., "blue moon" emergencies). Thus, all telework-ready employees expected to work during an emergency should have the opportunity or be required to telework regularly to ensure that they will be able to function effectively and efficiently on a day when Federal offices are closed in the Washington, DC, area.

Unscheduled telework

OPM strongly encourages agencies to permit telework-ready employees to telework on any day OPM makes an announcement that includes an unscheduled telework announcement. As permitted by their agency's policies, procedures, and subject to any applicable collective bargaining requirements (as consistent with law), non-emergency telework-ready employees must notify their supervisor of their intent to use unscheduled leave or unscheduled telework, as appropriate.

Delayed Arrival

Agencies **may not** require employees to perform unscheduled telework when OPM announces "Open with Option for Unscheduled Leave/Unscheduled Telework," "Open – XX hour(s) Delayed Arrival with Option for Unscheduled Leave/Unscheduled Telework," or "Open – Delayed Arrival – Employees Must Report To Their Office No Later Than XX:XX with Option for Unscheduled Leave or Unscheduled Telework." Telework should always be voluntary during these particular announcements and employees should be given the opportunity to perform unscheduled telework, take leave, use a combination of the two, or report to the official worksite. If an employee chooses to use unscheduled telework versus report to the workplace, the employee does not receive excused absence.

Early Departure

When OPM announces an early departure, employees who are already performing telework should continue teleworking the entire day. If the employee is impacted by the emergency, the employee may request appropriate leave, earned compensatory time off, or credit hours (if permitted), or may ask to reschedule his or her alternative work schedule day off when additional time off is needed. Agencies may consider exercising their authority to grant excused absence to teleworking employees on a case-by-case basis (e.g., for electricity/infrastructure/connectivity issues).

Federal Office Closure

When Federal offices are closed, OPM's operating status announcement requires that two types of telework-ready employees will perform work: (1) employees already scheduled to perform telework on the effective day of the announcement and (2) employees required to perform telework according to their written telework agreements when the Federal Government is closed. However, there is a third category of teleworkers – (3) those who are telework-ready but are neither scheduled to work on the day of an OPM closure announcement or required to work on that day according to their written telework agreement. Currently, group (3) may be the largest category of telework employees. OPM urges that agencies migrate towards a more comprehensive telework policy by incorporating group (3) employees into group (2) (i.e., employees required to perform telework when the Federal Government is closed). Note that written telework agreements, consistent with agency policies and subject to any collective bargaining agreements (as consistent with law), must be in place before requiring telework for both (1) and (2).

To ensure for the continued migration of group (3), agencies should develop new telework policies (if not already in place). Agencies can begin by reviewing their current policies and procedures to determine if unscheduled telework has been operating as intended and make any needed corrections. Then, individual written telework agreements must be implemented to reflect the new telework policies. The goal is to have full use of telework-ready employees, for both essential and nonessential functions, to support continuity of operations on any day when Federal offices are closed. Agencies and employees must remember that telework is voluntary. While employees' capacity to telework is a critical human resources tool when Federal offices are closed, it is primarily a valuable work-life flexibility used by employees throughout the year, helping to balance work and personal needs.

It is important to note that Federal offices will be closed when it is unsafe for employees to commute; however, employees who can telework in the safety of their own homes generally should no longer be granted excused absence. In order for an agency to accomplish this outcome, however, it must lay the foundation by incorporating a requirement to work during a period when the office is closed into its telework agreements with its employees. The long-term focus should remain on encouraging telework, where appropriate, and ensure that telework-employees have the ability to work from home year-round and that the telework agreements in place address the requirement to work during an office closure. Agencies should consider exercising their authority to grant excused absence to teleworking employees with a requirement to work during

closures on a case-by-case basis when it is not possible to telework for some or all of the workday (e.g., power outages or network connection problems that prevent telework) when Federal offices are closed.

C. Employees on Pre-Approved Leave When Federal Offices Are Closed

OPM's Federal closure operating status announcement no longer states that all non-emergency employees on pre-approved paid leave receive excused absence. An employee on pre-approved paid leave will generally remain on leave if the Federal office at which the employee works is closed.

As agencies establish their telework policies and incorporate them into their continuity of operations, the ability of Federal employees to perform duties outside the office has provided a useful means of keeping the Government operational. Therefore, employees on pre-approved paid leave may either telework or remain on leave when Federal offices are closed, subject to agency policy, and in accordance with any applicable collective bargaining agreement (as consistent with law). Any employee who wishes to telework in lieu of scheduled leave must be telework-ready.

Please note, if an employee plans to use sick leave on a day Federal office are closed and the legal basis for that sick leave has been eliminated, the sick leave must be cancelled. For example, an employee is scheduled to use sick leave for a medical appointment and that medical appointment is cancelled. The employee may not remain on sick leave.

Below is a decision matrix that summarizes this guidance.

Decision Matrix on the Application of the Pre-Approved Leave Practice

Pre-Approved Paid Leave on a Day when Federal Office are Closed			
Scenario	Employees Required to Telework		Employees <u>NOT</u> Required to Telework
Sick Leave for routine doctor appointment Doctor's appointment is canceled. As a result, the employee's sick leave must also be canceled*	Options—		Receive excused absence
	Perform Telework	Request annual leave or other time off	
Sick Leave for Employee Illness*	Remains on sick leave. Employee is sick and unable to work.		
Annual Leave **	Remains on annual leave. The employee is not prevented from working and there is no expectation for the employee to perform work.		
Notes:			

*Sick leave may only be used in accordance with law and regulation. See 5 CFR 630.401.

**Employees on annual leave on a day when the Federal offices are closed will remain on leave. However, since the administration of leave remains at the discretion of the agency, agency-specific rules concerning when an employee will be permitted to cancel leave remains subject to agency policy in accordance with any applicable collective bargaining agreements or requirements (as consistent with law). For example, agency policies may allow an employee with a telework agreement to cancel annual leave to perform telework.

D. Appropriate Use of Leave Without Pay

Three of OPM's operating status announcements state that an employee may “use” leave without pay (LWOP) on a day when unscheduled leave is announced (i.e., “Open with Option for Unscheduled Leave or Unscheduled Telework;” “Open--XX Hours Delayed Arrival with Option for Unscheduled Leave or Unscheduled Telework;” and “Open – Delayed Arrival – Employees Must Report To Their Office No Later Than XX:XX with Option for Unscheduled Leave or Unscheduled Telework”)

LWOP is defined as a temporary nonpay status and absence from duty. LWOP must be requested by the employee and approved by the supervisor. OPM's procedures themselves do not create an automatic entitlement to use LWOP when the option for unscheduled leave is made available. It is the responsibility of each agency to manage LWOP, and in some circumstances, an agency may determine that it is inappropriate to approve LWOP. Except for these rare circumstances, OPM encourages agencies to permit the use of LWOP if an employee does not have available paid leave or other paid time off (e.g., earned compensatory time off) to his or her credit and is impacted by the emergency or event that generated the announcement for unscheduled leave.

The administration of leave is based on internal agency procedures, in compliance with any collective bargaining requirements, as applicable and consistent with law. Each agency is responsible to develop and administer its own internal policies on leave, including LWOP, and communicate those policies to its supervisors and employees.

OPM uses the following language in the Procedures and encourages agencies to develop and communicate any additional policies needed for the pre-approval of LWOP for the applicable OPM operating status announcements. Employees are well aware of their leave balances, and if a supervisor and employee have the conversation in advance, LWOP can be a useful flexibility alongside telework and adjustments to flexible work schedules (including AWS days off) when emergencies arise.

“Non-Emergency Employees. Non-emergency employees must notify their supervisor of their intent to use unscheduled leave or unscheduled telework (if telework-ready). In accordance with their agency's policies and procedures, and subject to any applicable collective bargaining requirements (as consistent with law), non-emergency employees have the option to use (1) earned annual leave, compensatory time off, credit hours, or sick leave, as appropriate; (2) leave

without pay; (3) their alternative work schedule day off or rearrange their work hours under flexible work schedules; or (4) unscheduled telework (if telework-ready).”

E. No Additional Pay or Paid Time Off for Employees Who Must Work or Remain at Worksite After the Normal Tour of Duty

Employees who are required to work on site (e.g., at the office) or telework during their regular tour of duty on a day when Federal offices are closed (or when other employees are authorized a delayed arrival or an early departure) are not entitled to receive overtime pay, credit hours, or compensatory time off for performing work during their regularly scheduled non-overtime hours.

Further, during a shelter-in-place or other emergency, employees may be restricted to their agency's premises for periods that extend beyond their normal tour of duty because of events beyond the agency's control. Most employees will not be entitled to any additional pay for this extended period. However, employees who are **required** to *remain in a state of readiness to perform work* during this extended period may be entitled to overtime pay for standby duty.

The rules on standby duty are found in 5 CFR 550.112(k), for employees who are exempt from the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), and in 5 CFR 551.431, for FLSA-covered employees. The key issue in determining whether an employee is entitled to overtime pay for standby duty is the nature of the restrictions placed on the employee. An employee is in a standby duty status if, for work-related reasons—

1. the employee is restricted by official order to a designated post of duty, **and**
2. the employee is assigned to be in a state of readiness to perform work with limitations on the employee's activities so substantial that the employee cannot use the time effectively for his or her own purposes.

The Comptroller General has ruled that periods of time during which an employee is required to remain at a work location are not considered compensable hours of work if the employee is detained for reasons that are not under the control of the agency or are not related to work requirements. (See Comp. General opinion B-187181, October 17, 1977.)

F. Failure to Report for Work

An emergency employee is required to work on a day when Federal offices are closed (or when OPM has authorized a delayed arrival or an early or immediate departure), and for such an employee, the day is a workday and normal time and attendance rules apply. A telework-ready employee may be required to work (based on agency policies and individual telework agreements, which may be subject to any applicable collective bargaining requirements, as consistent with law) on a day when Federal offices are closed (or when employees working at the office receive either a delayed arrival or an early departure announcement), and for such an employee, the day is a workday and normal time and attendance rules apply.

However, in rare situations an agency may determine that circumstances justify granting excused absence to an emergency employee or a telework-ready employee (required to work based on agency policies and telework agreements, which may be subject to any applicable collective bargaining requirements, as consistent with law), and such an employee may be granted excused absence (administrative leave) by the agency. This could occur, for instance, if weather conditions make it impracticable or dangerous for an emergency employee to travel to the worksite, or if power outages or network connection problems prevent telework.

If an employee who is required to work fails to report for work without adequate reason for his or her absence, the agency may place the employee on absence without leave (AWOL), and the employee may potentially be disciplined for AWOL by the agency. Each agency is responsible for determining whether the employee has adequate reasons for his or her absence.

Employees who are not designated as emergency employees or not required to telework should be granted excused absence when their office is closed and they are prevented from working due to the emergency. However, excused absence should not be granted to employees on (1) leave without pay, (2) official travel, or (3) a flexible or compressed work schedule day off.

III. OPM Guidance on Dismissal and Closure Procedures

The *Washington, DC, Area Dismissal and Closure Procedures* uses the following announcements:

A. OPM Announcement: OPEN

What OPM Announcement Means: “Federal agencies in the Washington, DC, area are **OPEN**. Employees are expected to report to their worksite or begin telework on time.”

Normal operating procedures are in effect. Employees account for their hours of work by **WATS**:

- Working at a worksite (typically the office) in the DC area,
- Alternative work schedules (AWS) day off,
- Teleworking, or
- Scheduled leave or other paid time off.

B. OPM Announcement: OPEN WITH OPTION FOR UNSCHEDULED LEAVE OR UNSCHEDULED TELEWORK

What OPM Announcement Means: “Federal agencies in the Washington, DC, area are **OPEN** and employees have the **OPTION** for **UNSCHEDULED LEAVE OR UNSCHEDULED TELEWORK**.”

Non-Emergency Employees. Non-emergency employees must notify their supervisor of their intent to use unscheduled leave or unscheduled telework (if telework-ready). In accordance with their agency’s policies and procedures, subject to any applicable

collective bargaining requirements (as consistent with law), non-emergency employees have the option to use (1) earned annual leave, compensatory time off, credit hours, or sick leave, as appropriate; (2) leave without pay; (3) their alternative work schedule day off or rearrange their work hours under flexible work schedules; or (4) unscheduled telework (if telework-ready).

Telework-Ready Employees. Telework-ready employees who are regularly scheduled to perform telework or who notify their supervisor of their intention to perform unscheduled telework must be prepared to telework for the entire workday, or take unscheduled leave, or a combination of both, for the entire workday, in accordance with their agency's policies and procedures, subject to any applicable collective bargaining requirements (as consistent with law).

Emergency Employees. Emergency employees are expected to report to their worksites on time unless otherwise directed by their agencies.

C. OPM Announcement: OPEN – XX HOUR(S) DELAYED ARRIVAL – WITH OPTION FOR UNSCHEDULED LEAVE OR UNSCHEDULED TELEWORK

What OPM Announcement Means: “Federal agencies in the Washington, DC, area are **OPEN** under **XX HOUR(S) DELAYED ARRIVAL** and employees have the **OPTION FOR UNSCHEDULED LEAVE OR UNSCHEDULED TELEWORK.**”

Delayed Arrival. Non-emergency employees should plan their commute so the arrival for work is no more than XX hour(s) later than the employees' normal arrival times. For example, if OPM announces a 2-hour delayed arrival policy, employees who normally would arrive at 8:00 a.m. should arrive for work no later than 10:00 a.m. Such employees will be granted excused absence (administrative leave) for up to the designated number of hours past their normal arrival times.

Non-Emergency Employees. Non-emergency employees must notify their supervisor of their intent to use unscheduled leave or unscheduled telework. In accordance with their agency's policies and procedures, subject to any applicable collective bargaining requirements (as consistent with law), non-emergency employees have the option to use (1) earned annual leave, compensatory time off, credit hours, or sick leave, as appropriate; (2) leave without pay; (3) their alternative work schedule day off or rearrange their work hours under flexible work schedules; or (4) unscheduled telework (if telework-ready). Employees who request unscheduled leave should be charged leave for the entire workday.

Telework-Ready Employees. Telework-ready employees who are regularly scheduled to perform telework, or who notify their supervisors of their intention to perform unscheduled telework, must be prepared to telework the entire workday or take unscheduled leave, or a combination of both, for the entire workday in accordance with their agency's policies and procedures, subject to any applicable collective bargaining requirements (as consistent with law).

Emergency Employees. Emergency employees are expected to report to their worksites on time unless otherwise directed by their agencies.

Flexible Work Schedules. For employees under flexible work schedules, agencies should consult OPM’s *Handbook on Alternative Work Schedules* (see information on “Excused Absence” in the “Flexible Work Schedules” section) to determine the “normal arrival and departure times” of employees on flexible schedules. The handbook is available on OPM’s website at <http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/reference-materials/handbooks/alternative-work-schedules>.

Pre-approved or Unscheduled Leave. Employees on pre-approved leave for the entire workday or employees who have notified their supervisors of their intent to use unscheduled leave when a delayed arrival is announced should be charged leave for the entire workday. Such employees should not be granted excused absence.

Personal Hardship. An agency may grant excused absence to employees who arrive later than their expected arrival time, if delayed for personal hardship reasons. For example, if OPM announces a 2-hour delayed arrival policy, and employees arrive for work 3 hours later than their expected arrival times, the employees should be charged 1 hour of leave. However, in the case of unique circumstances or hardships, agencies may grant excused absence for the excess time. Nonetheless, the circumstances under which a personal hardship may be granted are subject to collective bargaining, where applicable and consistent with law.

D. OPM Announcement: OPEN – DELAYED ARRIVAL – EMPLOYEES MUST REPORT TO THEIR OFFICE NO LATER THAN XX:XX – WITH OPTION FOR UNSCHEDULED LEAVE OR UNSCHEDULED TELEWORK

What OPM Announcement Means: “Federal agencies in the Washington, DC, area are **OPEN** under a **DELAYED ARRIVAL** where employees in the Washington, DC, area must **REPORT TO THEIR OFFICE NO LATER THAN XX:XX** and employees have the **OPTION FOR UNSCHEDULED LEAVE OR UNSCHEDULED TELEWORK.**”

Delayed Arrival. Non-emergency employees will receive excused absence up until the announced reporting time. For example, if OPM announces that all employees must report to their office by no later than 11:00 a.m., non-emergency employees will receive excused absence (administrative leave) until 11:00 a.m., but may arrive at their offices earlier.

Non-Emergency Employees. Non-emergency employees must notify their supervisor of their intent to use unscheduled leave or unscheduled telework. In accordance with their agency's policies and procedures, subject to any applicable collective bargaining requirements (as consistent with law), non-emergency employees have the option to use (1) earned annual leave, compensatory time off, credit hours, or sick leave, as appropriate; (2) leave without pay; (3) their alternative work schedule day off or rearrange their work hours under flexible work schedules; or (4) unscheduled telework (if telework-ready). Employees who request unscheduled leave should be charged leave for the entire workday.

Telework-Ready Employees. Telework-ready employees who are regularly scheduled to perform telework or who notify their supervisors of their intention to perform

unscheduled telework must be prepared to telework the entire workday or take unscheduled leave, or a combination of both, for the entire workday in accordance with their agency's policies and procedures, subject to any applicable collective bargaining requirements (as consistent with law).

Emergency Employees. Emergency employees are expected to report to their worksites on time unless otherwise directed by their agencies.

Pre-approved or Unscheduled Leave. Employees on pre-approved leave for the entire workday or employees who have notified their supervisors of their intent to use unscheduled leave when a delayed arrival is announced should be charged leave for the entire workday. Such employees should not be granted excused absence.

Personal Hardship. An agency may grant excused absence to employees who arrive after the announced reporting time, if delayed for personal hardship reasons. For example, if OPM announces Federal employees must report to their office by no later than 11:00 a.m., and employees arrive for work at 12:00 p.m., the employees should be charged 1 hour of leave. However, in the case of unique circumstances or hardships, agencies may grant excused absence for the excess time. Nonetheless, the circumstances under which a personal hardship may be granted are subject to collective bargaining, where applicable and consistent with law.

E. OPM Announcement: OPEN - XX HOUR(S) STAGGERED EARLY DEPARTURE

What OPM Announcement Means: "Federal agencies in the Washington, DC, area are **OPEN**. Employees should depart **XX HOUR(S)** earlier than their normal departure times from the office and may request **UNSCHEDULED LEAVE** to depart prior to their staggered departure times."

Early Departure Time. Non-emergency employees will be dismissed from their offices early relative to their scheduled departure times and will be granted excused absence (administrative leave) for the number of hours remaining in their workday beyond their early departure time. For example, if a 3-hour staggered early departure is announced, employees who work 8:30 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. would be expected to depart at 2:00 p.m. (i.e., the employees' staggered departure time).

Telework-Ready Employees. Telework-ready employees performing telework must continue to telework or take unscheduled leave, or a combination of both for the entire workday in accordance with their agency's policies and procedures, subject to any applicable collective bargaining requirements (where consistent with law).

Departure Prior to Early Dismissal Time. Non-emergency employees who wish to depart prior to their staggered early departure time may request to use unscheduled leave. Such employees will be charged leave for the remainder of their workday and will not be granted excused absence.

Emergency Employees. Emergency employees are expected to remain at their worksites unless otherwise directed by their agencies.

Flexible Work Schedules. For employees under flexible work schedules, agencies should consult OPM’s *Handbook on Alternative Work Schedules* (see information on “Excused Absence” in the “Flexible Work Schedules” section) to determine the “normal arrival and departure times” of employees on flexible schedules. The handbook is available on OPM’s website at <http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/reference-materials/handbooks/alternative-work-schedules>.

Pre-approved leave. Employees on pre-approved leave for the entire workday or employees who have requested unscheduled leave before an early departure policy is announced should continue to be charged leave for the entire workday or remainder of the workday, as applicable. Employees who are not affected by the emergency (i.e., not prevented from working) should not be granted excused absence (administrative leave).

- If employees are on leave and are not scheduled to return on that day, the employees are not prevented from working by the emergency and should continue to be charged leave.
- If employees on leave are scheduled to return to work after the applicable staggered departure time, the employees should be granted excused absence starting from the time they were scheduled to return from leave.
- If employees have pre-approved leave commencing after their staggered departure times (e.g., for a medical appointment), an agency may consider granting excused absence.

Personal hardships. Agencies may grant excused absence to permit employees to depart early to avoid personal hardships (e.g., when there is no available public transportation or no alternative forms of child/elder care, or the employee has health/medical limitations). However, agencies should bear in mind that the purpose of the early departure policy is to allow an orderly staggered release of Federal employees in the Washington, DC, area so as to avoid traffic gridlock and overcrowding of the public transit systems and to facilitate snow removal and operational capabilities of emergency first responders. Nonetheless, the circumstances under which a personal hardship may be granted are subject to collective bargaining, where applicable and consistent with law.

Employees who work from remote locations. Employees who work from remote locations may be required to work during any closure of their agencies' home office, consistent with their agencies' policies, procedures, and any applicable collective bargaining requirements (where consistent with law). If Federal offices in the geographic area of their remote location announce an early departure (e.g., a snow emergency), such employees should follow their agency’s policies, procedures, and any applicable collective bargaining requirements, or contact their supervisor for further information and instructions.

Employees on official travel. If non-emergency employees are on official travel on a workday when their agency offices are closed in the Washington, DC, area, employees are expected to continue working. However, if the emergency procedures of the agency make it impossible for the employees to continue work – e.g., the travel assignment requires frequent contact with the agency in the Washington, DC, area – excused absence may be appropriate. Agencies are responsible for determining whether employees are

required to continue working or will be granted excused absence under these circumstances.

F. OPM Announcement: OPEN - XX HOUR(S) STAGGERED EARLY DEPARTURE – EMPLOYEES MUST DEPART NO LATER THAN XX:XX AT WHICH TIME FEDERAL OFFICES ARE CLOSED.

What OPM Announcement Means: “Federal agencies in the Washington, DC, area are **OPEN**. Employees should depart **XX HOUR(S)** earlier than their normal departure time and may request **UNSCHEDULED LEAVE** to depart prior to their staggered departure time. Employees **MUST DEPART** at no later than XX:XX at which time **FEDERAL OFFICES** in the Washington, DC, area are **CLOSED**.”

Early Departure Time. Non-emergency employees will be dismissed relative to their normal departure times and will be granted excused absence (administrative leave) for the number of hours remaining in their workdays beyond their staggered departure time. All remaining non-emergency employees whose staggered departure times are later than the final departure time should depart from their office at the final departure time. All employees who depart at the final departure time will be granted excused absence (administrative leave) for the number of hours remaining in their workday, even if more than the XX hour(s) provided in the OPM announcement. For example, if a 3-hour staggered emergency early dismissal is announced with a final departure time at 2:00 p.m., and an employee works 7:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., the employee should leave at 12:30 p.m. (i.e., the employee’s early departure time). However, if an employee works 9:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., the employee should depart at 2:00 p.m. (the final departure time) instead of the employee’s staggered departure time at 3:00 p.m. In this case, the employee would receive 4 hours of excused absence (i.e., 2:00 to 6:00 p.m.).

Telework-Ready Employees. Telework-ready employees performing telework must continue to telework or take unscheduled leave, or a combination of both for the entire workday in accordance with their agency’s policies and procedures, subject to any applicable collective bargaining requirements (as consistent with law).

Departure Prior to Early Dismissal Time. Non-emergency employees who depart prior to their staggered early departure time or final departure time may request to use unscheduled leave. Such employees will be charged leave for the remainder of their workday and will not be granted excused absence.

Emergency Employees. Emergency employees are expected to remain at their worksite unless otherwise directed by their agencies.

Flexible Work Schedules. For employees under flexible work schedules, agencies should consult OPM’s *Handbook on Alternative Work Schedules* (see information on “Excused Absence” in the “Flexible Work Schedules” section) to determine the “normal arrival and departure times” of employees on flexible schedules. The handbook is available on OPM’s website at <http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/reference-materials/handbooks/alternative-work-schedules>.

Pre-approved leave. Employees on pre-approved leave for the entire workday or

employees who have requested unscheduled leave before an early departure policy is announced should continue to be charged leave for the entire workday or the remainder of the workday, as applicable. Employees who are not affected by the emergency (not prevented from working) should not be granted excused absence (administrative leave).

- If employees are on leave and are not scheduled to return on that day, the employees are not prevented from working by the emergency and should continue to be charged leave.
- If employees on leave are scheduled to return to work after the staggered departure or final departure time, as applicable, the employees should be granted excused absence starting from the time they were scheduled to return from leave.
- If employees have pre-approved leave commencing after their staggered departure times (e.g., for a medical appointment), an agency may consider granting excused absence.

Personal hardships. Agencies may grant excused absence to permit employees to depart early to avoid personal hardships (e.g., when there is no available public transportation or alternative forms of child/elder care, or the employee has health/medical limitations). However, agencies should bear in mind that the purpose of the early departure policy is to allow an orderly staggered release of Federal employees in the Washington, DC, area so as to avoid traffic gridlock and overcrowding of the public transit systems, and to facilitate snow removal and operational capabilities of emergency first responders. Nonetheless, the circumstances under which a personal hardship may be granted are subject to collective bargaining, where applicable and consistent with law.

Employees who work from remote locations. Employees who work from remote locations may be required to work during any closure of their agency's home office, consistent with their agencies' policies, procedures, and any applicable collective bargaining requirements (as consistent with law). If Federal offices in the geographic area of their remote location announce an early departure (e.g., a snow emergency), such employees should follow their agency's policies, procedures, and any applicable collective bargaining requirements, or contact their supervisor for further information and instructions.

Employees on official travel. If non-emergency employees are on official travel on a workday when their agency offices are closed in the Washington, DC, area, employees are expected to continue working. However, if the emergency procedures of the agency make it impossible for the employees to continue work – e.g., the travel assignment requires frequent contact with the agency in the Washington, DC, area – excused absence may be appropriate. Agencies are responsible for determining whether employees are required to continue working or will be granted excused absence under these circumstances.

G. OPM Announcement: IMMEDIATE DEPARTURE—FEDERAL OFFICES ARE CLOSED

What OPM Announcement Means: “IMMEDIATE DEPARTURE. Employees should depart **IMMEDIATELY. FEDERAL OFFICES** in the Washington, DC, area

are **CLOSED.**”

Immediate Departure. Non-emergency employees should depart immediately from their offices. All non-emergency employees will be granted excused absence (administrative leave) for the number of hours remaining in their workday. For example, if OPM announces an immediate departure at 12:00 p.m., all non-emergency employees will be granted excused absence (administrative leave) for the number of hours remaining in their scheduled workday unless covered by one of the exceptions listed below.

Emergency Employees. Emergency employees are expected to remain at their worksites unless otherwise directed by their agencies.

Exceptions

Employees who leave before an immediate departure policy is announced. Employees who depart before an immediate departure policy is announced should be charged annual leave or leave without pay beginning at the time the employees left work and for the remainder of their scheduled workday.

Employees scheduled to return to work. If employees are scheduled to return from leave after an immediate departure is announced, the agency should charge leave for the period prior to the immediate departure time and grant excused absence for the remainder of the workday following the immediate departure time.

Telework-Ready Employees. Telework-ready employees performing telework must continue to telework for the entire workday or take unscheduled leave for the remainder of the workday, as applicable in accordance with their agencies’ policies and procedures, subject to any applicable collective bargaining requirements (as consistent with law).

Employees who work from remote locations. Employees who work from remote locations may be required to work during any closure of their agency’s home office, consistent with their agencies’ policies, procedures, and any applicable collective bargaining requirements (as consistent with law). If Federal offices in the geographic area of their remote location are closed (e.g., due to a snow emergency), such employees should follow their agency’s policies, procedures, and any applicable collective bargaining requirements, or contact their supervisor for further information and instructions.

Employees on official travel. If non-emergency employees are on official travel on a workday when their agency’s offices are closed in the Washington, DC, area, employees are expected to continue working. However, if the emergency procedures of the agency make it impossible for the employees to continue work – e.g., the travel assignment requires frequent contact with the agency in the Washington, DC, area – excused absence may be appropriate. The agency is responsible for determining whether employees are required to continue working or will be granted excused absence under these circumstances.

Employees on an alternative work schedule (AWS) day off. If Federal offices are closed on the employees' regular AWS day off, they are not entitled to an additional "in lieu of" day off. AWS employees who fulfill their biweekly work requirement in less than 10 working days are already entitled to an AWS day off. Such employees may not receive an additional day off. In addition, employees cannot be granted excused absence on a nonworkday. AWS employees whose agency's offices are closed on their AWS day off may not be granted excused absence for the scheduled nonworkday.

H. OPM Announcement: FEDERAL OFFICES ARE CLOSED – EMERGENCY AND TELEWORK-READY EMPLOYEES MUST FOLLOW THEIR AGENCY'S POLICIES

What OPM Announcement Means: "FEDERAL OFFICES in the Washington, DC, area are **CLOSED**. Emergency and telework-ready employees required to work must follow their agency's policies, including written telework agreements."

Federal offices are closed. Non-emergency employees will be granted excused absence (administrative leave) for the number of hours they were scheduled to work unless covered by one of the exceptions listed below.

Emergency Employees. Emergency employees are expected to report for work on time unless otherwise directed by their agencies.

Exceptions

Telework-Ready Employees. Telework-ready employees who are scheduled to perform telework on the effective day of the announcement or who are required to perform telework on a day when Federal offices are closed must telework the entire workday or request leave, or a combination of both, in accordance with their agencies' policies and procedures, subject to any applicable collective bargaining requirements (as consistent with law).

Employees on pre-approved leave. An employee on pre-approved paid leave will generally remain on leave if the Federal office at which the employee works is closed. However, if the employee is scheduled to use sick leave for a medical appointment and that medical appointment is cancelled, the legal basis for the sick leave has been eliminated and the sick leave must be cancelled. In addition, if an employee has scheduled annual leave, that leave may be cancelled if the employee is ready, willing, and able to telework (telework-ready with a telework agreement in place) and agrees to perform telework in lieu of the scheduled leave. However, since the administration of leave remains at the discretion of the agency, agency-specific rules concerning when an employee will be permitted to cancel leave remains subject to agency policy in accordance with any applicable collective bargaining agreements or requirements (as consistent with law).

Employees on leave without pay. Employees on leave without pay, leave without pay for military duty, workers' compensation, suspension, or in another nonpay status are not granted excused absence when Federal offices are closed. These employees should

remain in their current status. Employees in a nonpay status have no expectation of working and receiving pay for a day during which Federal offices are closed and therefore will not be granted excused absence.

Employees who work from remote locations. Employees who work from remote locations may be required to work during any closure of their agency's home office, consistent with their agencies' policies, procedures, and any applicable collective bargaining requirements (as consistent with law). If Federal offices in the geographic area of their remote location are closed (e.g., due to a snow emergency), such employees should follow their agency's policies, procedures, and any applicable collective bargaining requirements, or contact their supervisor for further information and instructions.

Employees on official travel. If non-emergency employees are on official travel on a workday when their agency's offices are closed in the Washington, DC, area, employees are expected to continue working. However, if the emergency procedures of the agency make it impossible for the employees to continue work – e.g., the travel assignment requires frequent contact with the agency in the Washington, DC, area – excused absence may be appropriate. The agency is responsible for determining whether employees are required to continue working or will be granted excused absence under these circumstances.

Employees on an alternative work schedule (AWS) day off. If Federal offices are closed on the employees' regular AWS day off, they are not entitled to an additional "in lieu of" day off. AWS employees who fulfill their biweekly work requirement in less than 10 working days are already entitled to an AWS day off. Such employees may not receive an additional day off. In addition, employees cannot be granted excused absence on a nonworkday. AWS employees whose agency's offices are closed on their AWS day off may not be granted excused absence for the scheduled nonworkday.

I. OPM Announcement: SHELTER-IN-PLACE

What OPM Announcement Means: "FEDERAL OFFICES in the Washington, DC, area are under SHELTER-IN-PLACE procedures and are CLOSED TO THE PUBLIC."

General Description. Shelter-in-place (SIP) procedures are conducted when employees (and visitors) must remain in the office or take immediate shelter in a readily accessible interior location to protect themselves. SIP may be activated for a variety of reasons, which could include severe weather (e.g., tornadoes) or danger from exposure to outside contaminants in the event of a release into the atmosphere of hazardous materials such as radiological, biological, or chemical contaminants. A shelter-in-place announcement could be used with other OPM operations status announcements for the Washington, DC, area. It is anticipated that an OPM shelter-in-place announcement for the Washington, DC, area would be extremely rare and likely would be in effect for a relatively short period of time. OPM's announcement is not intended to supersede any agency-specific SIP plans or procedures, and agencies retain the authority to act on their own without an OPM SIP announcement as circumstances dictate.

Employees Located at Agency Worksites. All employees should follow their agency's emergency procedure for shelter-in-place announcements. Employees should remain in their designated safe area until they are notified by agency officials that they may return to their offices or leave their worksites.

Employees Prevented from Entering Agency Worksites. Employees who are unable to enter their buildings due to shelter-in-place procedures should be granted excused absence (administrative leave) for the duration of the announcement.

Telework-Ready Employees. Telework-ready employees performing telework are expected to continue working during the shelter-in-place, unless affected by the emergency or otherwise notified by their agencies.

IV. OPM and Agency Responsibilities

OPM's Responsibilities

1. In the Washington, DC, area, OPM is the Federal Government's point of contact with municipal governments and regional organizations, such as the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA). OPM officials will consult with various officials, including appropriate Federal, DC government, municipal, and regional officials before the OPM Director makes operating status announcements.
2. The Director of OPM will make a decision on the status of Federal operations. This decision will be based on consideration of both the need to keep Federal operations functioning as normally as possible and our concern for the safety of Federal employees.
3. OPM will notify agency Chief Human Capital Officers (CHCOs) of any decision to announce unscheduled leave/unscheduled telework, a delayed arrival, early departure, immediate departure, shelter in place, or closure of Federal offices. Information will be available at <http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/snow-dismissal-procedures/current-status> or by phone at (202) 606-1900.

Agencies' Responsibilities

1. Agencies should establish policies and procedures to be consistent with and implement OPM's *Washington, DC, Area Dismissal and Closure Procedures*. This includes revising and updating employees' written telework agreements and incorporating such agreements into emergency planning, including updating internal agency announcements based on OPM's latest changes.
2. Agencies should develop explicit procedures in advance that employees may use during emergencies to notify their supervisor promptly of their intent to use unscheduled leave or perform unscheduled telework (if telework-ready) prior to the start of the workday or as soon as practicable. Agencies should also develop similar procedures for employees to request unscheduled leave when OPM announces an early departure with either a staggered or final departure time or an immediate

departure after the workday has already begun.

3. At least annually, agencies should identify emergency employees (including COOP employees) and notify them in writing. The written notice should include the requirement that emergency employees report for work or remain at work (or work at home or report to an alternative worksite) when Government operations are disrupted and an explanation that announcements of unscheduled leave/unscheduled telework, delayed arrival, early or immediate departure, or Federal offices are closed in the Washington, DC, area do not apply to them unless they are instructed otherwise.
4. Agencies should establish policies for the use of unscheduled telework. For the majority of OPM's operating status announcements, it is expected that telework will be either an available flexibility or a requirement to allow telework-ready employees to avoid lengthy commutes or avoid using leave.
5. To implement and/or maintain telework readiness, agencies should continue to (1) review their current telework policies to ensure that telework is integrated as part of the flexibilities permitted during disruption of normal operating procedures and that telework agreements require telework when Federal offices are closed; (2) ensure that the IT infrastructure is in place to allow large numbers of employees to telework simultaneously; (3) establish new situational (ad hoc) telework arrangements for employees who can telework, and wish to do so on a situational (ad hoc) basis, but typically do not; and (4) permit or require all employees who can telework, and who wish to do so on at least a situational (ad hoc) basis, to practice it regularly and frequently to maintain effectiveness and ensure functionality.
6. OPM urges agencies to adjust their policies, procedures, and telework agreements, subject to any applicable collective bargaining requirements, as applicable and consistent with law, so that when OPM announces that Federal offices in the Washington, DC, area are closed, employees with telework agreements will be expected to work on those days rather than be granted excused absence (administrative leave). Agencies and employees should take into account the quid-pro-quo benefits of telework. That is, telework is an option to maintain work productivity without compromising employee safety, and telework is an option available all year long to help employees balance personal and work needs.
7. For employees who are expected to telework when Federal offices are closed, it is imperative that they have the opportunity to telework on a regular basis to ensure that they will be able to function effectively and efficiently.
8. For telework-ready employees, any requirements concerning the unscheduled telework option should be explicit in their telework agreements. If an agency determines that certain circumstances may require non-emergency employees to report for work or remain at work when Government operations are disrupted, the agency should establish a procedure for notifying them individually prior to the emergency.
9. Agencies must establish internal policies for employees regarding the use of

unscheduled leave and flexible work schedules. This includes explicit policies on the use of leave without pay, ability to change an AWS day off, or flexibility to rearrange starting and stopping times under a flexible work schedule when an OPM operating status announcement is made that includes one of these flexibilities. If an agency determines that certain circumstances may require non-emergency employees to report for work or remain at work when Government operations are disrupted, the agency should establish a procedure for notifying them individually prior to the emergency.

10. Agencies must notify employees that, if they are required to report for work and fail to do so, they will be charged absence without leave (AWOL) for the period not worked and may potentially be disciplined for AWOL upon further determination by the agency. (See E. Failure to Report for Work above.) In unique situations, an agency may determine that circumstances justify excusing emergency employees or non-emergency employees from duty, and they may be granted excused absence (administrative leave).
11. Agencies are responsible for determining dismissal policies, emergency procedures, and leave policies for employees on shift work and alternative work schedules (i.e., flexible or compressed work schedules) and for informing employees of these policies. Agencies should consult OPM's *Handbook on Alternative Work Schedules* (see information on "Excused Absence" in the "Flexible Work Schedules" section) to determine the "normal arrival and departure times" of employees on flexible schedules. The handbook is available on OPM's website at <http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/reference-materials/handbooks/alternative-work-schedules>.
12. Agencies should have shelter-in-place plans developed to use during certain emergencies. These plans should be communicated clearly to their employees and tested periodically.
13. During an agency-specific closure or dismissal, agencies should have their own methods for communicating and updating their status of operations to employees. These methods could include agency website notices, emergency call-in phone numbers, phone trees, automated emails, media announcements, etc. To the extent possible, each agency should notify OPM's Office of Communications and the CHCO Executive Director of any agency-specific closure or dismissal.
14. For weather-related situations in certain large metropolitan areas outside of the Washington, DC, area, the Federal Executive Boards provide up-to-date, accurate, and consistent information, such as from the National Weather Service, to their local Federal agency leaders to assist them in making informed decisions on the appropriate operating status for their Federal agency employees in those areas. Each local Federal agency head makes workforce status decisions for his or her agency employees and should report that workforce status decision to his or her agency Headquarters. Federal employees in geographic areas outside of the Washington, DC, area should check with their own agency regarding the operating status of their duty station.

V. Additional Resources for Emergency Guidance

In any emergency situation, Government operations may be disrupted for extended periods. OPM has provided numerous resources to enable Federal agencies to continue functioning effectively during an emergency situation. The following information offers further guidance on continuing operations during extended emergencies and emergency preparedness:

Handbook on Pay and Leave Benefits for Federal Employees Affected by Severe Weather Emergencies or Other Emergency Situations

<http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/reference-materials/handbooks/emergencybenefits.pdf>

Telework.Gov – Emergency Planning

http://www.telework.gov/guidance_and_legislation/emergency_planning/index.aspx

Ready.Gov – Emergency Planning

<http://www.ready.gov/>

Appendix: OPM Announcements on the Status of Federal Government Operations in the Washington, DC, Area

STATUS OF FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS WASHINGTON, DC, AREA	
The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) provides the following announcements to the media when a disruption occurs before or during the workday in the Washington, DC, area.	
Announcement	What Announcement Means
OPEN	<p>“Federal agencies in the Washington, DC, area are OPEN.”</p> <p>Employees are expected to report to their worksites or begin telework on time. Normal operating procedures are in effect.</p> <p>Employees account for their hours of work by WATS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working at a worksite in the DC area, • Alternative work schedules (AWS) day off, • Teleworking, or • Scheduled leave or other paid time off.

**OPEN WITH OPTION FOR
UNSCHEDULED LEAVE OR
UNSCHEDULED TELEWORK**

“Federal agencies in the Washington, DC, area are **OPEN** and employees have the **OPTION** for **UNSCHEDULED LEAVE OR UNSCHEDULED TELEWORK.**”

Non-Emergency Employees must notify their supervisor of their intent to use unscheduled leave or unscheduled telework (if telework-ready). In accordance with their agency’s policies and procedures, subject to any applicable collective bargaining requirements (as consistent with law), non-emergency employees have the option to use:

- (1) earned annual leave, compensatory time off, credit hours, or sick leave, as appropriate;
- (2) leave without pay;
- (3) their alternative work schedule (AWS) day off or rearrange their work hours under flexible work schedules; or
- (4) unscheduled telework (if telework-ready).

Telework-Ready Employees who are regularly scheduled to perform telework or who notify their supervisor of their intention to perform unscheduled telework must be prepared to telework for the entire workday, or take unscheduled leave, or a combination of both, for the entire workday in accordance with their agency’s policies and procedures, subject to any applicable collective bargaining requirements (as consistent with law).

Emergency Employees are expected to report to their worksites on time unless otherwise directed by their agencies.

OPEN – XX HOUR(S) DELAYED ARRIVAL – WITH OPTION FOR UNSCHEDULED LEAVE OR UNSCHEDULED TELEWORK

“Federal agencies in the Washington, DC, area are **OPEN** under **XX HOUR(S) DELAYED ARRIVAL** and employees have the **OPTION FOR UNSCHEDULED LEAVE OR UNSCHEDULED TELEWORK**. Employees should plan to arrive for work no more than XX hour(s) later than they would be expected to arrive.”

Non-Emergency Employees who report to the office will be granted excused absence (administrative leave) for up to XX hour(s) past their expected arrival time. In accordance with their agency’s policies and procedures, subject to any applicable collective bargaining requirements (as consistent with law), non-emergency employees may notify their supervisor of their intent to use:

- (1) earned annual leave, compensatory time off, credit hours, or sick leave, as appropriate;
- (2) leave without pay;
- (3) their alternative work schedule (AWS) day off or rearrange their work hours under flexible work schedules; or
- (4) unscheduled telework (if telework-ready).

(Employees who request unscheduled leave should be charged leave for the entire workday.)

Telework-Ready Employees who are regularly scheduled to perform telework or who notify their supervisor of their intention to perform unscheduled telework must be prepared to telework for the entire workday, or take unscheduled leave, or a combination of both, for the entire workday in accordance with their agency’s policies and procedures, subject to any applicable collective bargaining requirements (as consistent with law).

Pre-approved Leave. Employees on pre-approved leave for the entire workday or employees who requested unscheduled leave for the entire workday should be charged leave for the entire day.

Emergency Employees are expected to report to their worksite on time unless otherwise directed by their agencies.

OPEN – DELAYED ARRIVAL – EMPLOYEES MUST REPORT TO THEIR OFFICE NO LATER THAN XX:XX – WITH OPTION FOR UNSCHEDULED LEAVE OR UNSCHEDULED TELEWORK

“Federal agencies in the Washington, DC, area are **OPEN** under a **DELAYED ARRIVAL** where employees in the Washington, DC, area must **REPORT TO THEIR OFFICE NO LATER THAN XX:XX** and have the **OPTION FOR UNSCHEDULED LEAVE OR UNSCHEDULED TELEWORK.**”

Non-Emergency Employees who report to the office will be granted excused absence (administrative leave) up until the announced reporting time. In accordance with their agency’s policies and procedures, subject to any applicable collective bargaining requirements (as consistent with law), non-emergency employees may notify their supervisor of their intent to use:

- (1) earned annual leave, compensatory time off, credit hours, or sick leave, as appropriate;
- (2) leave without pay;
- (3) their alternative work schedule (AWS) day off or rearrange their work hours under flexible work schedules; or
- (4) unscheduled telework (if telework-ready).

Telework-Ready Employees who are regularly scheduled to perform telework or who notify their supervisor of their intention to perform unscheduled telework must be prepared to telework for the entire workday, or take unscheduled leave, or a combination of both, for the entire workday in accordance with their agency’s policies and procedures, subject to any applicable collective bargaining requirements (as consistent with law).

Pre-approved Leave. Employees on pre-approved leave for the entire workday or employees who requested unscheduled leave for the entire workday should be charged leave for the entire workday.

Emergency Employees are expected to report to their worksite on time unless otherwise directed by their agencies.

**OPEN - XX HOUR(S)
STAGGERED EARLY
DEPARTURE**

“Federal agencies in the Washington, DC, area are **OPEN**. Employees should depart **XX HOUR(S)** earlier than their normal departure times and may request **UNSCHEDULED LEAVE** to depart prior to their staggered departure times.”

Non-emergency Employees:

Excused Absence. Non-emergency employees will be dismissed from their office **XX hour(s)** early relative to their normal departure times and will be granted excused absence (administrative leave) for the number of hours remaining in their workday.

Departure Prior to Early Departure Time. Non-emergency employees who depart prior to their staggered early departure times may request to use unscheduled leave. Such employees will be charged leave for the remainder of their workday and will not be granted excused absence.

Telework-Ready Employees performing telework must continue to telework or take unscheduled leave, or a combination of both for the entire workday or the remainder of the workday, as applicable, in accordance with their agency’s policies and procedures, subject to any applicable collective bargaining requirements (as consistent with law).

Pre-approved leave. An employee on pre-approved leave for the entire workday or an employee who has requested unscheduled leave before an early departure policy is announced should continue to be charged leave for the remainder of the workday.

Emergency Employees are expected to remain at their worksite unless otherwise directed by their agencies.

**OPEN - XX HOUR(S)
STAGGERED EARLY
DEPARTURE – ALL
EMPLOYEES MUST DEPART
NO LATER THAN XX:XX AT
WHICH TIME FEDERAL
OFFICES ARE CLOSED**

“Federal agencies in the Washington, DC, area are **OPEN**. Employees should depart **XX HOUR(S)** earlier than their normal departure time and may request **UNSCHEDULED LEAVE** to depart prior to their staggered departure time. All employees **MUST DEPART** at no later than XX:XX at which time **FEDERAL OFFICES** in the Washington, DC, area are **CLOSED**.”

Non-emergency Employees:

Excused Absence. Non-emergency employees will be dismissed from their office early relative to their normal departure time or at the final departure time and will be granted excused absence (administrative leave) for the number of hours remaining in their workday beyond their early departure time or their final departure time.

Departure Prior to Early Departure Time. Non-emergency employees who depart prior to their staggered early departure time or final departure time may request to use unscheduled leave. Such employees will be charged leave for the remainder of their workday and will not be granted excused absence.

Telework-Ready Employees performing telework must continue to telework or take unscheduled leave, or a combination of both for the entire workday in accordance with their agency’s policies and procedures, subject to any applicable collective bargaining requirements (as consistent with law).

Pre-approved leave. Employees on pre-approved leave for the entire workday or employees who have requested unscheduled leave before an early departure policy is announced should continue to be charged annual or sick leave for the entire day or remainder of the workday, as applicable.

Emergency Employees are expected to remain at their worksite unless otherwise directed by their agencies.

**IMMEDIATE DEPARTURE –
FEDERAL OFFICES ARE
CLOSED**

“IMMEDIATE DEPARTURE. Employees should depart **IMMEDIATELY. FEDERAL OFFICES** in the Washington, DC, area are **CLOSED.**”

Non-emergency employees should depart immediately from the office. All non-emergency employees will be granted excused absence (administrative leave) for the number of hours remaining in their workday unless they are:

- on official travel outside of the Washington, DC, area,
- on leave without pay, or
- on an alternative work schedule (AWS) day off.

Telework-Ready Employees performing telework must continue to telework for the entire workday or take unscheduled leave for the remainder of the workday, as applicable in accordance with their agency’s policies and procedures, subject to any applicable collective bargaining requirements (as consistent with law).

Pre-approved leave. Employees on pre-approved leave for the entire workday or employees who have requested unscheduled leave before an immediate departure policy is announced should continue to be charged annual or sick leave for the entire day or remainder of the workday, as applicable.

Emergency Employees are expected to remain at their worksite unless otherwise directed by their agencies

**FEDERAL OFFICES ARE
CLOSED – EMERGENCY AND
TELEWORK-READY
EMPLOYEES MUST FOLLOW
THEIR AGENCY’S POLICIES**

“**FEDERAL OFFICES** in the Washington, DC, area are **CLOSED**. Emergency and telework-ready employees required to work must follow their agency’s policies, including written telework agreements.”

Non-emergency employees will be granted excused absence (administrative leave) for the number of hours they were scheduled to work unless they are:

- required to telework,
- on official travel outside of the Washington, DC, area,
- on pre-approved leave (including leave without pay), or
- on an alternative work schedule (AWS) day off.

Telework-Ready Employees who are scheduled to perform telework on the effective day of the announcement or who are required to perform telework on a day when Federal offices are closed must telework the entire workday or request leave, or a combination of both, in accordance with their agency’s policies and procedures, subject to any applicable collective bargaining requirements (as consistent with law).

Emergency Employees are expected to report to their worksite unless otherwise directed by their agencies.

<p>SHELTER-IN-PLACE</p>	<p>“FEDERAL OFFICES in the Washington, DC, area are under SHELTER-IN-PLACE procedures and are CLOSED TO THE PUBLIC.”</p> <p><i>Employees Located at Agency Worksite.</i> All employees should follow their agency’s emergency procedures for shelter-in-place. Employees should remain in their designated safe area until they are notified by agency officials that they may return to the office or leave the worksite.</p> <p><i>Telework-Ready Employees</i> performing telework are expected to continue working during the shelter-in-place unless affected by the emergency or otherwise notified by their agencies.</p>
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Note: As a general principle, OPM may issue a new or hybrid operating status announcement at any time, depending on the particulars of an emergency, for the safety of employees and continuity of Government operations. OPM will always attempt to use the published operating status announcements.



U.S. Office of Personnel Management

Employee Services • Pay and Leave

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