



UNITED STATES OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
Washington, DC 20415

The Director

Wednesday, November 13, 2002

Subject: Washington, DC, Area Dismissal or Closure Procedures

Introduction

The following guidelines apply to situations that prevent significant numbers of Federal employees in the Washington, DC, area from reporting for work on time or which require agencies to close all or part of their activities, including adverse weather conditions (snow emergencies, severe icing conditions, floods, and hurricanes), natural disasters, and other disruptions of Government operations (air pollution, disruption of power and/or water, interruption of public transportation, etc.). When there are disruptions of Government operations, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) will make announcements to the media as to whether Federal agencies in the Washington, DC, area are "**open**" or "**closed**," or operating under an "**unscheduled leave**," "**delayed arrival**," or "**early dismissal**" policy. The announcements are defined in the table below.

These procedures apply to employees in all executive agencies located inside the "Washington Capital Beltway" (the highway that circles the nation's capital). These procedures do not apply to employees of the U.S. Postal Service, the government of the District of Columbia, or private sector entities, including contractors. Agency facilities outside the Washington Capital Beltway may prefer to develop their own plans, since they are subject to different weather and traffic conditions than those inside the Beltway. In unusual situations, however, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) may issue guidelines affecting agency facilities outside the Washington Capital Beltway, as well.

It is essential that Federal agencies in the metropolitan area comply with this area-wide plan and the announced decisions on dismissal or closure. These procedures are based on the principle that the business of the Federal Government is vital to serving the public everywhere and that we must do so without compromising the safety of our employees. **Agencies should avoid independent action.** Agencies generally look to OPM to coordinate any decisions to dismiss Federal employees from work with officials in local and Federal agencies, transportation authorities, and the media so as to minimize disruption of the highway and transit systems, reduce traffic congestion, and ensure that affected employees are treated as consistently as possible. Therefore, all employees are expected to report for work or remain at work unless specifically excused by their supervisors.

Agencies that find it necessary to exclude certain offices, activities, or categories of employees from this plan should notify OPM of such exemptions and update such notices when necessary. Application of this guidance must be consistent with the provisions of applicable collective bargaining agreements or other controlling policies, authorities, and instructions.

In addition, we have provided pay and leave guidance for employees affected by the "Washington, DC, Area Dismissal or Closures Procedures" at opm.gov/oca/compmemo/2003/2003-17a.asp.

Designating "Emergency Employees" and "Mission-Critical" Emergency Employees

Agencies should designate emergency employees who are critical to agency operations in dismissal or closure situations. Each agency head has the discretion to identify and designate those employees that he or she judges to be necessary to continue agency operations in any given emergency situation. There are no standard definitions or categories in this regard, and agency heads (or their designees, as applicable) are free to make such determinations based on the agency's unique mission requirements and/or circumstances. The designation of emergency employees may vary according to the particular nature of an exigency. Such designations should be part of an agency's emergency response/continuity of operations plans and should be communicated (preferably well in advance) to emergency employees, so that they can be prepared to support and sustain agency operations in an emergency.

In addition, agencies may wish to identify a cadre of "**mission-critical**" emergency employees who are expected to remain in contact with their agencies at all times during any closure situation and may be called to work during emergencies dealing with national security, extended emergencies, or other unique situations. Agencies must identify the emergency situations in which "mission-critical" emergency employees will be expected to report for work and whether such employees must report for work at their regular worksites or alternative worksites.

Telework Employees

We recognize that employees who telework from home or from an alternative workplace are an invaluable resource during a time of emergency. Therefore, agencies may wish to modify their current policies concerning emergency situations to require telework employees to continue to work at their alternative worksites on their telework day when the agency is closed. Any requirement that a telework employee continue to work if the agency closes on his or her telework day should be included in the employee's formal or informal telework agreement. On a case-by-case basis, an agency may excuse a telework employee from duty during an emergency if the emergency adversely affects the telework site (e.g., disruption of electricity, loss of heat, etc.), if the teleworker faces a personal hardship that prevents him or her from working successfully at the telework site, or if the teleworker's duties are such that he or she cannot continue to work without contact with the regular worksite.

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 (METRO). OPM officials will consult with various officials, including appropriate D.C. government, municipal and regional officials before the Director makes a decision on closure, dismissal, or special leave treatment.

2. The Director of OPM will make a decision on whether to curtail Federal operations. This decision is based on the need to keep Federal operations functioning as normally as possible and on concern for the safety of Federal employees.
3. We will notify agency Human Resources Directors and Chief Human Capital Officers of any decision to "close" Federal agencies, or announce an "**unscheduled leave**," "**delayed arrival**," or "**early dismissal**" policy. Information will be available at <http://www.opm.gov/status/index.asp>.

AGENCY RESPONSIBILITIES

1. At least annually, agencies should establish and disseminate written procedures for dismissal or closure to employees working in the Washington, DC, area. The notice should tell employees how they will be notified and include the text of the media announcements to be used and a detailed explanation of their meaning.
2. Agencies should notify their employees of the procedures for requesting leave when an "**unscheduled leave**" policy is announced. When an "**unscheduled leave**" policy is announced, employees must contact their agencies to request unscheduled annual leave, leave without pay, and/or the use of previously earned compensatory time off or earned credit hours under an alternative work schedule.
3. At least annually, agencies should identify those employees who must report for work and continue Government operations during a disruption of operations and notify them in writing that they are designated as "**emergency employees**." The notice identifying employees as emergency employees should include the requirement that such employees report for or remain at work when operations are disrupted and an explanation that dismissal or closure announcements do not apply to them unless they are instructed otherwise. In addition, agencies may identify a cadre of "**mission-critical**" **emergency employees** who may be called to work during extended emergencies, emergencies dealing with national security, or other unique situations. **Agencies must identify the emergency situations in which "mission-critical" emergency employees will be expected to report for work and notify the "mission-critical" emergency employees of this policy.** Agencies should direct "mission-critical" emergency employees to report for work either at their regular worksite or alternative worksite. Further, "mission-critical" emergency employees are expected to remain in contact with their agencies at all times during any closure situation. Agencies may wish to issue communications and other equipment to "mission-critical" emergency employees to facilitate contact in these situations.

If an agency determines that a situation requires "**non-emergency employees**" to report for or remain at work when Government operations are disrupted, the agency should establish a procedure for notifying them individually.

4. An agency must include in the employee's formal or informal telework agreement any requirement that telework employees continue to work at their alternative worksites on their telework day when the agency is closed. At least annually, agencies should remind all teleworkers of this requirement.

5. Agencies must notify employees that if they are required to report for work and are not otherwise granted excused absence, they will be charged absence without leave (AWOL) for the period not worked and may potentially be disciplined for the AWOL at the agency's discretion.
6. Agencies are responsible for determining closure, dismissal, 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.

Excused Absence

Agencies are encouraged to follow these procedures. However, agencies have discretionary authority to grant a reasonable amount of excused absence for individual hardships or circumstances unique to an employee. For example, factors such as distance, availability of public transportation, or available alternatives to childcare or eldercare may be considered.

No Additional Pay or Paid Time Off for Employees Who Must Work

Emergency employees and telework employees who are required to work during their regular tour of duty on a day when their agency is closed (or when other employees are dismissed early) are not entitled to receive overtime pay, credit hours, or compensatory time off for performing work during their regularly scheduled hours.

Extended Emergency Situations

In an emergency situation, Government operations may be disrupted for extended periods. OPM has provided numerous resources to enable you to continue the effective functioning of your organization during an emergency situation. This information is available at opm.gov/emergency. In addition, the following fact sheets offering further guidance on continuing operations during extended emergencies are available on OPM's Website:

Emergency Situations that Prevent Employees from Reporting for Work

opm.gov/oca/compmemo/2003/PreventEmpsReportingforWork.asp

Emergency Situations that Restrict Employees to their Agency's Premises ("Shelter in Place")

opm.gov/oca/compmemo/2003/ShelterInPlace.asp

Furloughs Due to Extended Emergencies

opm.gov/oca/compmemo/2003/Furloughs.asp

Status of Government Operations

DISRUPTIONS BEFORE THE WORKDAY BEGINS

The Office of Personnel Management will provide one of the following five announcements to the media when a disruption occurs before the workday begins. These announcements do NOT apply to individuals who are designated as "emergency employees." Emergency employees are expected to report for work on time unless excused by their supervisors.

Announcement	What Announcement Means
1."Federal agencies in the Washington, DC, area are OPEN; employees are expected to report for work on time."	Employees are expected to report for work on time.
2."Federal agencies in the Washington, DC, area are OPEN under an UNSCHEDULED LEAVE policy."	Employees who cannot report for work may request unscheduled leave for their entire scheduled workday. Employees must notify their supervisors of their intent to take unscheduled leave. Emergency employees are expected to report for work on time.
3."Federal agencies in the Washington, DC, area are OPEN under a DELAYED ARRIVAL policy. Employees should plan to arrive for work no more than xx hours later than they would normally arrive."	Employees should plan their commutes so that they arrive for work no more than xx hours later than they would normally arrive. Employees who arrive for work more than xx hours later than their normal arrival time will be charged annual leave or leave without pay for the additional period of absence from work. Emergency employees are expected to report for work on time.
4."Federal agencies in the Washington, DC, area are OPEN under a DELAYED ARRIVAL/UNSCHEDULED LEAVE policy. Employees should plan to arrive for work no more than xx hours later than they would normally arrive, and employees who cannot report for work may take unscheduled leave."	Employees should plan their commutes so that they arrive for work no more than xx hours later than they would normally arrive. Employees who arrive for work more than xx hours later than their normal arrival time will be charged annual leave or leave without pay for the additional period of absence from work. Employees who cannot report for work may request unscheduled leave for their entire scheduled workday. Emergency employees are expected to report for work on time.
5."Federal agencies are CLOSED."	Federal agencies are closed. Emergency employees are expected to report for work on time. Non-emergency employees (including employees on pre-approved leave) will be granted excused absence for the number of hours they were scheduled to work. This does not apply to employees on leave without pay, workers' compensation, suspension, or in another nonpay status. Employees on alternative work schedules are not entitled to another AWS day off in lieu of the workday on which the agency is closed.

DISRUPTIONS AFTER THE WORKDAY BEGINS

The Office of Personnel Management will provide the following announcement to the media when a disruption occurs after the workday begins. This announcement does not apply to individuals who are designated as "emergency employees." Emergency employees are expected to remain at work unless excused by their supervisors.

Announcement	What Announcement Means
<p>"Federal agencies in the Washington, DC, area are operating under an EARLY DISMISSAL policy. Employees should be dismissed by their agencies xx hours earlier than their normal departure time from work."</p>	<p>Employees should be dismissed by their agencies relative to their normal departure times from work. For example, if a 3-hour "early dismissal" policy is announced, workers who normally leave their offices at 4:00 p.m. should leave at 1:00 p.m. Employees who must leave work earlier than their early dismissal time will be charged annual leave or leave without pay from the time of their departure through the remainder of their scheduled workday.</p> <p>Employees on pre-approved leave for the entire day should be charged leave for the entire day.</p> <p>Emergency employees are expected to remain at work.</p>