

For: RMA Employees

**RMA Telework Program**

**Approved by:** Administrator, Risk Management Agency



**1 Overview**

**A Background**

For over a decade, laws addressing telework have been in effect for Federal employees. The main legislative mandate for telework was established in 2000 in Pub. L. 106-346, Section 359. This law states that “each executive agency shall establish a policy under which eligible employees of the agency may participate in telecommuting to the maximum extent possible without diminished employee performance.”

**Note:** Telework has had various names, such as flexible workplace, flexiplace, telecommuting, and work at home.

Telework is of particular interest for its benefits in the following areas:

- recruiting and retaining the best possible employees
- helping employees manage long commutes and other work/life issues that, if not addressed, can have a negative impact on their effectiveness or lead to employees leaving Federal employment
- using it as a reasonable accommodation for disability
- reducing traffic congestion, emissions, and infrastructure impact in urban areas, thereby improving the environment
- saving taxpayer dollars by decreasing Government real estate costs
- ensuring continuity of essential Government functions in the event of national or local emergencies.

<b>Disposal Date</b>	<b>Distribution</b>
September 1, 2009	All RMA employees

## Notice PM-2697

### 1 Overview (Continued)

#### B Purpose

This notice:

- applies to all RMA employees, however, with respect to bargaining unit employees, to the extent that any provisions herein conflict with a provision contained in any applicable collective bargaining agreement, the collective bargaining agreement shall prevail
- outlines RMA telework policy for the following agreements:
  - regular (long-term)
  - ad-hoc (short-term, periodic, or recurring)
- provides procedures for applying for the Telework Program
- provides guidance on how to access web-based telework training for supervisors and employees.

**Note:** This notice does **not** provide information about short-term medical telework. See Notice PM-2156.

#### C Contact

For more information about this notice or the RMA Telework Program, contact Susan Brown, HRD, at 202-401-0066 or TDD 202-205-9057.

### 2 Definitions

#### A Definition of Telework

Telework, which is also known as flexiplace, flexible workplace, telecommuting, and work at home, means performance of official duties at an alternative worksite, such as a home, telecenter, or other satellite work location.

As defined by OPM, telework is **not** either of the following.

- **Work Extension.** Many employees take work home with them. This is remote work, but it is not considered telework within the scope of the legislation.
- **Mobile Work.** Some employees, by the nature of their jobs, are generally offsite and may even use their home as their “home base.” Because their work requires this setup and they travel much of the time, they are not considered teleworkers. This is different from “hoteling” arrangements, in which frequent teleworkers use shared space when they are onsite.

2 **Definitions (Continued)**

**B Definition of Teleworker**

A teleworker is an employee who works at an alternative work location, such as a home, telecenter, or other satellite work location, either on a regular or recurring schedule for a minimum of 1 day a pay period or on an ad-hoc basis.

**C Definition of Telework Agreement**

A telework agreement is the agreement between the supervisor and teleworker that outlines the terms and conditions of the telework arrangement. A telework agreement must be completed for all types of telework arrangements, including ad-hoc.

**Note:** All telework agreements must be renewed on an annual basis.

**D Definition of Temporary Changes to the Telework Agreement**

Temporary changes to the telework agreement are allowed and do **not** require a new or amended telework agreement. Temporary changes may include, but are not limited to, requests to work a different or additional telework day because of:

- unexpected meetings
- inclement weather
- major traffic disturbances that are a consequence of planned or unplanned events, such as large demonstrations.

Temporary changes must be approved, in writing, by the first-line supervisor. Temporary changes in the telework agreement are encouraged, but not guaranteed.

A missed telework day may be rescheduled if approved by the supervisor. However, there is no entitlement to the telework day. A telework schedule is **not** the same as a work schedule. Missing a day of telework is **not** like missing a compressed work schedule day off. It is **not** mandatory to reschedule the telework day if:

- it is the same day as a Federal holiday
- the employee has to forfeit a telework day to attend meetings at the regular worksite.

## 2 Definitions (Continued)

### E Definition of Permanent Change to the Telework Agreement

A permanent change to the telework agreement is when an employee submits a new telework agreement any time there is a permanent change to their work status and/or telework work schedule. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- change in position
- change in supervisor, other than temporary acting supervisors
- increase or decrease in the number of telework days
- change in telework schedule, such as changing from teleworking on Mondays to teleworking on Wednesdays
- cancellation or removal from telework agreement (end date must reflect last day worked telework).

**Note:** This is especially important when using a telecenter because the information must be tracked for budget purposes.

## 3 RMA Telework Program Requirements

### A Eligible Employees

All RMA employees are eligible for telework, except employees with either of the following:

- current conduct issues
- current performance issues.

**Note:** Approval of a telework request is **not** recommended until these issues are resolved.

### B Policy Statement

RMA supports a flexible workplace policy for eligible employees:

- who want to work offsite for part of the pay period
- whose work is appropriate to this arrangement
- where such an arrangement will benefit the Government.

Employees who perform duties that are suitable for teleworking, and meet other established eligibility criteria, may be afforded the opportunity to telework.

## Notice PM-2697

### 3 RMA Telework Program Requirements (Continued)

#### B Policy Statement (Continued)

Telework is **not** an entitlement. Telework is a voluntary program that may be terminated, at any time, by the employee or supervisor.

Telework is a tool that can be used to address short-term Agency or employee needs. Short-term uses may include either of the following:

- allowing an employee to telework while the employee recovers from a minor injury affecting his or her mobility

**Note:** See Notice PM-2156.

- working on a special work-related project with identifiable timeframes and deliverables.

#### C Types of Telework

RMA supports the following 3 types of telework.

Type of Telework	Description	Approval Level
Ad-Hoc	A work schedule that does <b>not</b> follow a regular weekly schedule.	First-Line Supervisor
Regular	A work schedule of 1 to 4 days per week at the telework site on a regularly scheduled basis.  <b>Example:</b> Jane Smith works from her home every Wednesday.	
Short-Term Medical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Refer to Notice PM-2156 for policy and application procedures.</li><li>• Short-term medical telework must be supported by appropriate documentation from a medical professional that is acceptable to HRD.</li></ul>	HRD

### 3 RMA Telework Program Requirements (Continued)

#### D Work Requirements

Rarely will 100 percent of an employee's duties be appropriate for telework. Employees will usually be required to perform, at least, part of their duties at their official duty station. Appropriate work for a flexible worksite **must** meet the following criteria:

- have portable tasks

**Note:** The employee and supervisor must ensure that there are sufficient, consistent portable tasks in the employee's current job to support the number of telework days requested.

- be measurable

**Note:** Managers often ask, "How do I know what my employees are doing when I cannot see them?" Performance standards for offsite employees are the same as performance standards for onsite employees. Management expectations of a teleworker's performance should be clearly addressed **before** the employee begins teleworking. As with onsite employees, teleworkers must be held accountable for the results they produce. Good performance management techniques practiced by a manager will mean a smooth, easy transition to a telework environment.

- be able to be completed away from the regular worksite without adversely affecting the workload of other employees, office coverage, or the mission of the work unit. Managers and employees are responsible for ensuring adequate office coverage at all times. Managers may define adequate office coverage for the circumstances of their office.

Appropriate offsite work or tasks, may include, but are not limited to, work that requires the following:

- thinking and writing
- data analysis, if the data is accessible remotely
- reviewing grants or case files
- writing decisions, reports, etc.
- telephone-intensive tasks
- conference coordination duties
- research to obtain information

**3 RMA Telework Program Requirements (Continued)**

**D Work Requirements (Continued)**

- following up on participants in a study
- computer-oriented tasks, such as programming, web page design, data entry, and word processing.

**E Ineligible Work Tasks**

The following are **not** eligible for telework:

- work that requires physical transport of personally identifiable information (PII) data
- work that requires creation of hardcopy PII data at the telework site.

**Note:** PII data may be accessed through Agency-approved secure databases and connections.

**F Employee Qualifications**

To be considered for telework, an employee must:

- be performing at least at the “Fully Successful” level
- demonstrate motivation, independence, and dependability in accomplishing work assignments
- demonstrate good organization and time management skills
- be engaged in work that can be performed successfully offsite
- be easily accessible while at the alternate worksite
- provide to their supervisor and maintain current contact information at the alternate worksite.

Telework is **not** suitable for employees who are any of the following:

- have performance and/or conduct issues
- are in a position that requires frequent face-to-face interaction with co-workers, customers, or others
- need to be in the office to learn the organization
- require on-the-job training

## Notice PM-2697

### 3 RMA Telework Program Requirements (Continued)

#### F Employee Qualifications (Continued)

- require close supervision.

**Restrictions:** No union representation duties may be performed while teleworking and union officials on 100 percent time are ineligible for telework.

### 4 Responsibilities

#### A Supervisory Responsibilities

Supervisors shall consider the following criteria in evaluating an application for telework.

- Is the employee eligible to participate?

**Note:** See subparagraph 3 A.

- Will the office staff be adversely affected?
- Can work assignments and responsibilities be evenly distributed?
- Will office coverage be adversely affected?
- Will service to internal and external customers be adversely affected?
- Are work activities substantially portable and appropriate for the amount of telework days requested?
- Can the work activities be performed equally effective outside of the office?
- Can the work be managed by results rather than direct observation?

**Note:** Supervisors should discuss with employees the method of how work will be measured or monitored offsite before the employee begins telework.

- Can security and confidentiality of data be adequately assured?

**Note:** Supervisors must ensure that the employee receives RMA information systems security training.

- Are most work assignments not classified and can the work be performed outside of the office without compromising PII?

**Note:** PII can only be accessed electronically by a government-owned computer.

## 4 Responsibilities (Continued)

### B Employee Responsibilities

Telework should **not** adversely affect either the employee's performance or that of his or her co-workers. Therefore, if the employee's job involves frequent interaction with his or her co-workers or customers, the employee is expected to be available at the same times and provide the same level of service as when he or she is at the regular worksite.

A successful telework arrangement starts with a good self-assessment. Employees should consider the following factors in making an honest determination about their telework capabilities:

- sufficient portable work for the amount of telework being proposed
- ability to work independently, without close supervision
- comfort with the technologies, if any, needed to telework
- good communication with manager, co-workers, and customers that will enable a relatively seamless transition from onsite to offsite
- telework office space is conducive to getting the work done
- dependent care arrangements are established.

**Note:** Telework is **not** a substitute for child care, elder care, or care of any other dependent adults.

While managers are ultimately responsible for the effective functioning of their work unit, teleworkers should help manage the group's expectations and their own communication to avoid any negative impact from their telework arrangement. Teleworkers should address the following issues.

- **Backup:** Even with portable work, there are inevitably instances where physical presence is required and a co-worker may need to step in. Co-worker backups should be planned, should not be onerous, and should be reciprocal. Cross-training staff has broad organizational benefits and should be a management priority.
- **On-the-spot assistance:** Teleworkers may occasionally need someone who is physically in the main office to assist them, such as to FAX a document or look up information. These arrangements should not be unduly burdensome. A "buddy system" between teleworkers may be the least disruptive solution.

**4 Responsibilities (Continued)**

**B Employee Responsibilities (Continued)**

- **Communication with manager:** The manager must be kept apprised of the teleworker's schedule, how to make contact with the teleworker, and the status of all pending work.
- **Communication with co-workers:** Co-workers must be informed about the appropriate handling of telephone calls or other communications that are the teleworker's responsibility.

In addition, employees shall:

- follow the terms and conditions of RMA's telework policy and agreement
- maintain productivity and customer service
- ensure that technology needed to perform the job offsite is currently available and operating effectively offsite
- ensure compliance with applicable building and safety codes and local permits

**Note:** This includes, but is not limited to, ensuring that the electrical system and safeguards are adequate to protect RMA computers, printers, and other equipment.

- follow established procedures for:
  - requesting and obtaining approval for leave
  - accurately recording time and attendance
- request necessary RMA services and equipment for their telework arrangement
- ensure a safe and adequate place to perform work offsite that:
  - is free from interruptions
  - provides the necessary level of security and protection for Government property

**Note:** If this is **not** available in the employee's home, he or she may consider working from a Telecommuting Center.

- ensure disconnection of RMA services and proper return of RMA equipment and software, upon the completion of or removal from the telework agreement

#### 4 Responsibilities (Continued)

##### B Employee Responsibilities (Continued)

- maintain security by:
  - participating in RMA information systems security training
  - achieving sufficient technical proficiency to implement required measures
  - providing a high level of security to any personal or private information accessed at the telework site or transported between locations
  - remaining sensitive to individual rights to personal privacy
- ensure personal safety for home-based telework by:
  - providing appropriate telework space, with ergonomically correct chair, desk, and computer equipment
  - ensuring that the designated alternate work space is free from hazards
  - immediately reporting any work-related accident occurring at the telework site, and providing the supervisor with all medical documentation related to the accident.

#### 5 Preliminary Requirements

##### A Requirements Before Working Offsite

Requirements in this paragraph must be completed before an employee starts to work offsite. In addition, all clearances and technical requirements must be in place before any employee can begin telework.

##### B Determining Portable Work and Measurement of Work

Employees and supervisors shall discuss portable tasks that are to be completed offsite. There must be:

- sufficient portable work tasks for the number of requested telework days
- an agreement on the types of assignments to be completed at the alternate worksite
- an understanding about how work completed at the alternate worksite will be measured.

**Note:** In most instances, the employee's normal work products and tasks should be the measured product.

## 5 Preliminary Requirements (Continued)

### C Offsite Workdays

The supervisor, in consultation with the employee, shall determine the number of offsite workdays each pay period. See subparagraph 3 C for the types of telework available and the maximum number of offsite days allowed for each type. These requirements are the same for full-time as well as part-time employees.

In addition to regularly scheduled onsite days, supervisors may require employees to attend meetings or other onsite events. As much advance notice of these events will be given to employees who are not scheduled to be in the office on those days.

### D Telework Expectations

Supervisors shall communicate their expectations for telework to the entire staff, not just telework participants. Office telework guidelines shall be within the scope of this policy. Employees should know that the offsite employee is “at work” and regular assignments should flow to the telework employee.

Communicating telework guidelines will help when employees must act on the supervisor’s behalf. If acting employees have a clear understanding of what is expected from telework within their office, it will ensure consistency and minimize confusion. Examples of guidelines include, but are not limited to, the following:

- how ad-hoc telework is approved
- how temporary changes are requested and approved
- if employees have to forward their regular worksite telephone number to the alternate worksite
- if and what procedures are used to measure work performed offsite.

### E Hours of Duty and Work Schedules

Rules on hours of duty and core time apply to telework employees.

Alternative work schedules available to onsite employees may be approved for telework employees. A telework employee’s work schedule is established with the concurrence of the supervisor and parallels the office’s schedule as documented on FFAS-956.

Generally, a telework participant works the same work schedule and hours of duty whether at the official duty station or the alternate worksite.

**5 Preliminary Requirements (Continued)**

**F Dependent Care**

Although telework will give some employees more time for their family responsibilities, employees may **not** use duty time for providing dependent care or any purpose other than official duties. Telework is **not** a substitute for day care. Telework employees shall **not** have a dependent needing attention and care in the home during work hours, unless an in-home care provider is present.

**Note:** Older children (usually 12 and older) who can take care of themselves before and after school may be in the home during work hours.

**G Training**

All supervisors and employees must complete the respective “Telework Training” located on AgLearn before entering into a telework agreement. Follow this table to access the training.

<b>Step</b>	<b>Action</b>
1	Access AgLearn at <b>http://www.aglearn.usda.gov</b> .
2	Under “Learner Center”, CLICK: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Learner Login”</li> <li>• “Continue” on the warning screen.</li> </ul>
3	On the eAuthentication Login Screen: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• enter the user ID and password</li> <li>• CLICK “Login”.</li> </ul>
4	CLICK “ <b>Catalog</b> ” located at the top of the screen.
5	Under “Subject Area Menu”, click the triangle (▶) next to “ <b>AgLearn Original Courseware Structure</b> ”. <p><b>Note:</b> This takes a moment to open.</p>
6	CLICK “ <b>Risk Management Agency</b> ”.
7	Locate “ <b>TeleWork 101 for Employees or TeleWork 101 for Managers</b> ”. CLICK “ <b>Launch Content</b> ”.

## **6 Personnel Rules That Apply to Telework Program**

### **A Introduction**

The rules in this paragraph apply to all teleworkers.

### **B Pay and Leave**

All rules on pay and leave administration apply to telework employees according to 17-PM.

### **C Overtime/Compensatory Time and Credit Hours**

Rules on overtime/compensatory time and credit hours apply to telework employees. Employees must request advance approval to work overtime/compensatory time or credit hours and receive advance written approval. Telework privileges may be revoked for employees who work unapproved overtime/compensatory time or credit hours. Employees on a telework arrangement may earn overtime/compensatory time or credit hours according to 17-PM.

### **D Emergency Dismissals**

A teleworker may sometimes, but not always, be affected by a dismissal requiring the office at their official duty station to close.

Teleworking will be considered for emergency situations that involve national security, extended emergencies, or other unique situations. As a result, an employee teleworking on the day of an emergency RMA closure can be required to continue working from their alternative worksite if the closure occurs on his or her telework day. Teleworkers may be designated as either “emergency” or “mission critical” teleworkers.

Emergency teleworkers may be required to continue to work at his or her alternative worksite during emergency situations when RMA is closed.

A mission critical teleworker:

- is expected to remain in contact with RMA at all times during any closure situation
- may be called on to work at his or her alternative worksite during emergencies dealing with national security, extended emergencies, or other unique situations.

In general, employees that telework from their home should begin duty at their regularly scheduled time, even if the Government is closed.

**6 Personnel Rules That Apply to Telework Program (Continued)**

**D Emergency Dismissals (Continued)**

Refer to the following table for further guidance.

<b>IF...</b>	<b>THEN...</b>
the official duty station office is affected by an emergency, but the alternative worksite is unaffected	the employee is <b>not</b> excused and must continue to work his or her normal workday.  <b>Example:</b> On a snow day, the telework employee is <b>not</b> excused unless he or she cannot perform work at the alternative worksite because the regular office is closed.
the official duty station office <b>and</b> the alternative worksite are affected by a widespread emergency	the employee may be granted excused absence as appropriate.
an emergency affects only the alternative worksite for a major portion of the workday	depending on the circumstances, either of the following may apply:  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the employee may be required to do either of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• report to the official duty station office</li> <li>• request leave</li> </ul> </li> <li>• be granted excused absence.</li> </ul>

**E Official Duty Station**

RMA will follow OPM’s guidance on official duty station as it relates to telework.

**F Performance Standards**

Generally, the same performance standards will apply to telework employees and onsite employees who perform the same tasks. Work productivity that cannot be measured by performance standards is **not** appropriate for telework.

Performance standards for telework employees will:

- be results-oriented
- describe the quantity and quality of expected work products and the method of evaluation.

**G Position Descriptions**

Established position descriptions will apply to telework employees.

**6 Personnel Rules That Apply to Telework Program (Continued)**

**H Time and Attendance**

Supervisors shall continue to:

- review the telework employee's request for leave
- certify the telework employee's time and attendance.

**I Worker's Compensation**

Telework employees:

- are covered by the Federal Employees Compensation Act
- may qualify for payment for on-the-job injury or occupational illness if a complete and current safety inspection has been previously completed.

**J Zoning**

Telework employees shall:

- determine, and comply with, any local zoning restrictions
- pay for any costs of working at home that arise from local zoning requirements.

**K Liability**

RMA will **not** be held liable for damages to an employee's personal or real property while the employee is performing official duties or while using RMA's equipment.

**Exceptions:** RMA may be held liable for claims arising under:

- the Federal Tort Claims Act
- the Military Personnel and Civilian Employees Claims Act.

Telework employees shall obtain necessary insurance coverage, business use permits, variances, etc., from local municipalities, homeowner's associations, etc.

**L Special Accommodations**

Requests for special accommodations will be approved on a case-by-case basis. To request an accommodation, contact either of the following at least 3 weeks before starting telework:

- Susan Brown at 202-401-0066 or TDD 202-205-9057
- Renee Beauford at 816-926-2831.

## 7 Denying or Terminating Telework Agreement by Management

### A Denying or Terminating Telework Agreement

Telework requests may be denied and telework agreements may be terminated. Telework is **not** an employee right, even if the employee is considered “eligible” by RMA standards. Denial and termination decisions must be based on business needs or performance, **not** personal reasons.

Denial or termination of a telework agreement should include information about when the employee might reapply and also, if applicable, what actions the employee should take to improve his or her chance of approval. Denial notification should be provided in a timely manner.

Normally, the employee will **not** be removed from telework for a single minor infraction of the telework agreement. The supervisor and employee will make a bonafide effort to work out specific problems before any decision is made to remove the employee from the Telework Program.

Upon termination of the telework agreement, the employee shall return to the regular worksite. A reason an employee may be removed from telework includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- less than fully successful, or the equivalent, employee performance
- adverse organizational productivity
- valid internal and external customer complaints
- conduct issues
- failure to adhere to the provisions of the telework agreement.

## 8 Applying for Telework

### A Telework Management System (TMS)

All RMA employees shall request telework through TMS. Employees shall use their eAuthentication user ID and password to access TMS. TMS and instructions may be found at <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/hrdapp?area=home&subject=wpsv&topic=tel>.

### B TMS Help

For help with TMS, contact the TMS Help Desk by either of the following:

- telephone at 202-690-2256
- e-mail at [FSA.EMSO@wdc.usda.gov](mailto:FSA.EMSO@wdc.usda.gov).

## 9 Hardware/Software Requests

### A Providing Computer Equipment

Employees approved for telework must use a Government-issued computer to access LAN files.

**Note:** FAX machines:

- may be available on a case-by-case basis
- are generally approved for medical telework requests only.

### B Using Personal Equipment

Personally owned equipment may only be used if the teleworker can successfully work without the need to access LAN files. Using web-accessed e-mail and/or a thumb drive are currently authorized from personal computers.

## 10 Unauthorized Expenses

### A Utility Expenses

Telework employees must pay any additional utility expenses associated with working at home.

### B Telephone Expenses

RMA will **not** support or reimburse teleworkers for any of the following services:

- long-distance telephone calls made on a private residential line that are **not** made using an FTS 2000 Calling Card
- a residential telephone line used for personal **and** Government calls
- caller ID
- voice mail at the telework worksite
- 3-way calls.

## 11 Office Equipment, Supplies, and Materials

### A Office Equipment

RMA does **not** provide office equipment for teleworkers.

**Examples:** Examples of office equipment that will **not** be provided include, but are not limited to, the following:

- cabinet
- chair
- desk.

### B Supplies and Materials

RMA will provide supplies and materials for telework participants.

**Examples:** Examples of supplies and materials that can be provided include, but are not limited to, the following:

- paper
- pencils and pens
- thumb drives
- folders
- binders.

All supplies and materials must be ordered through normal procurement procedures from the employee's work unit.