



Washington, DC Area Dismissal or Closure Procedures

November 2009

A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR OF THE U.S. OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

Attached for your information are the U.S. Office of Personnel Management's (OPM's) *Washington, DC, Area Dismissal or Closure Procedures*. These procedures will apply in situations that prevent significant numbers of 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 emergency situations and major disasters, adverse weather conditions, natural disasters, and other incidents causing disruptions of Government operations, but not to pandemic situations. Federal Executive Boards have coordinated similar dismissal or closure procedures in other major metropolitan areas.

The *Washington, DC, Area Dismissal or Closure Procedures* were developed over a period of many years in consultation with the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments. As in the past, the 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 in the event of area-wide work disruptions because any changes in the working hours of Federal employees in this area must be coordinated carefully with municipal and regional officials in order to minimize disruption of the highway and mass transit systems.

The *Washington, DC, Area Dismissal or Closure Procedures* are available on OPM's website at <https://www.opm.gov/oca/compmemo/dismissal.pdf>.

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I. 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 major disasters and other emergency situations, adverse weather conditions, natural disasters, and other incidents causing disruptions of Government operations. Federal Executive Boards coordinate similar dismissal or closure procedures in other major metropolitan areas. When there are disruptions of Government operations, the U.S. 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 policy**, a **delayed arrival policy**, or an **early dismissal policy**. The announcements are defined in section V, Status of Government Operations, of these procedures.

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, 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 their assigned OPM Human Capital Officer 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.

II. Employees Who Are Expected to Work during Dismissal or Closure Situations

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 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 they can be prepared to support and sustain agency operations in an emergency.

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.

Emergency employees are expected to report for or remain at work in dismissal or closure situations unless otherwise directed by their agencies. An agency may determine that circumstances justify excusing an *emergency employee* (including a *mission-critical emergency employee*) from duty. An agency may grant a reasonable amount of excused absence to an *emergency employee* who is unable to report for work when he or she has an individual hardship or circumstances unique to the employee. For example, factors such as distance, availability of public transportation, or available alternatives to childcare or eldercare may be considered.

Mission-Critical Emergency Employees

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 to maintain continuity of Government operations. *Mission-critical emergency employees* 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 such employees will be expected to report for work and notify them of this policy. Agencies should direct *mission-critical emergency employees* to report for work at their regular worksite or an alternative worksite. Agencies may wish to issue communications and other equipment to *mission-critical emergency employees* to facilitate contact in emergency situations.

Telework

One of the major benefits of the telework program is the ability for employees to continue working at their alternative worksites during a disruption of Government operations. In recognition of the growing importance of teleworkers in maintaining the continuity of Government operations, agencies may require teleworkers to work when the agency is closed. Any requirement that a *teleworker* continue to work if the agency closes (or dismisses employees early) on his or her teleworkday or on any of his or her regularly scheduled workdays should be included in the employee's written telework agreement. On a case-by-case basis, an agency may excuse a *teleworker* from duty during an emergency situation 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.

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

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 non-overtime hours.

Failure to Report for Work

An employee may not be charged leave on a day when his or her agency is closed for the day. In unique situations, an agency may determine that circumstances justify excusing an *emergency employee* or nonemergency employee from duty, and he or she may be granted excused absence. However, if an employee who is required to work fails to report for duty without adequate reason for his or her absence, the agency may choose to place the employee on absence without leave (AWOL), and the employee may potentially be disciplined for the AWOL at the agency's discretion. The agency makes the determination as to whether the employee has adequate reason for his or her absence.

III. Employees Who Are Excused from Work during Dismissal or Closure Situations

Closure of Federal Agencies in the Washington, DC, Area

When OPM announces prior to the beginning of a workday that Federal agencies in the Washington, DC, area are **closed**, non-emergency employees may not be charged leave for that day. Instead, non-emergency employees (including employees on pre-approved paid leave) will be granted excused absence (administrative leave) for the number of hours they were scheduled to work.

Exceptions

Employee on official travel. If a non-emergency employee is on official travel on a workday when his or her agency is closed in the Washington, DC, area, the employee is expected to continue working. However, if the closure of the agency makes it impossible for the employee to continue work—i.e., 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 an employee is required to continue working or will be granted excused absence under these circumstances.

Employee on leave without pay. An employee on leave without pay, leave without pay for military duty, workers' compensation, suspension, or in another nonpay status does not receive excused absence when an agency is closed. These employees should remain in their current status. An employee in a nonpay status has no expectation of working and receiving pay for a day during which the agency is closed and is therefore not entitled to be paid for his or her absence.

Employee on an alternative work schedule (AWS). If an employee's agency is closed on his or her regular AWS day off, he or she is not entitled to an additional "in lieu of" day off. An AWS employee who fulfills his or her biweekly work requirement in less than 10 working days is already entitled to an AWS day off. Such employees may not receive an additional day off. In addition, an employee cannot be excused from duty on a nonworkday. An AWS employee whose agency closes on his or her AWS day off may not be granted excused absence for the scheduled nonworkday.

Teleworker. An employee who teleworks must follow his or her agency's policy on whether a *teleworker* must continue to work at the telework site if the agency closes on the employee's teleworkday or on any of the employee's regularly scheduled workdays.

Employee who teleworks from a remote location. Depending on the employing agency's policy, an employee who teleworks from a remote location may be required to work during any closure of his or her regular worksite. If the agencies in the area of the employee's telework site are closed because of adverse weather conditions (e.g., a snow emergency), the employee is expected to work at his or her telework site or

request annual leave, other paid time off, or leave without pay, unless the employee is otherwise instructed by the employing agency.

Unscheduled Leave Policy

When OPM announces an **unscheduled leave policy**, non-emergency employees may 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 without the prior approval of their supervisors. Non-emergency employees must inform their supervisors of their intent to take unscheduled leave.

Delayed Arrival Policy

When OPM announces a **delayed arrival policy**, non-emergency employees will be granted excused absence (administrative leave) for the designated number of hours past their normal arrival time. Non-emergency employees are expected to report for work no later than the designated number of hours past their normal arrival time. Employees should plan their commutes so that they arrive for work no more than xx hours later than they would normally arrive. For example, if OPM announces a 2-hour **delayed arrival policy**, employees who normally arrive at 8:00 a.m. must arrive for work no later than 10:00 a.m. An employee who arrives later than the designated number of hours should be charged annual leave for the excess time. For example, if OPM announces a 2-hour **delayed arrival policy**, and an employee arrives for work 3 hours later than his/her normal arrival time, the employee should be charged annual leave for 1 hour. However, in the case of unusual circumstances or hardship, an agency may choose to grant excused absence for the excess time.

Agencies may use the guidance in 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/oca/aws/index.htm>.

Emergency employees and *mission-critical emergency employees* are expected to report for work on time unless otherwise directed by their agencies. A *teleworker* must follow his or her agency's policy on whether a *teleworker* must report for work on time at the telework site when a delayed arrival policy is announced on the employee's teleworkday or on any of the employee's regularly scheduled workdays.

Early Dismissal Policy

When OPM authorizes an **early dismissal policy** before the workday ends, non-emergency employees will be granted excused absence (administrative leave) for the number of hours remaining in their workday beyond their designated *early dismissal time*. Non-emergency employees will be dismissed relative to their normal departure times from work. For example, if a 3-hour early dismissal is announced, employees who normally leave their offices at 5:00 p.m. would be authorized to leave at 2:00 p.m. (i.e., the employee's *early dismissal time*).

Agencies may use the guidance in 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/oca/aws/index.htm>.

Emergency employees and mission-critical emergency employees are expected to remain on duty, unless otherwise directed by their agencies. A *teleworker* must follow his or her agency's policy on whether a *teleworker* must continue to work at the telework site when an **early dismissal policy** is announced on the employee's teleworkday or on any of the employee's regularly scheduled workdays. An agency may require a *telework employee* to complete his or her regularly scheduled workday when an **early dismissal policy** is announced.

Exceptions

Supervisors may exempt individual employees from *early dismissal times* only to avoid hardships (e.g., when there is no available public transportation or no alternative forms of child/elder care are available to the employee). We note that the purpose of the **early dismissal policy** is to allow an orderly release of Federal employees in the Washington, DC, area so as to avoid traffic gridlock and overcrowding of the public transit systems.

Employee who leaves before early dismissal policy is announced or before his or her early dismissal time. An employee who leaves work before an **early dismissal policy** is announced, or before his or her *early dismissal time*, should be charged annual leave or leave without pay beginning at the time the employee left work and for the remainder of his or her scheduled workday. However, agencies may exempt individual employees from *early dismissal times* and grant a reasonable amount of excused absence to allow an employee to leave work early if he or she has an individual hardship or unique circumstance. For example, factors such as distance, availability of public transportation, or available alternatives to childcare or eldercare may be considered.

Employee on pre-approved leave or employee who has requested unscheduled leave. An employee on pre-approved leave for the entire workday or an employee who has requested unscheduled leave when an **early dismissal policy** is announced should be charged annual or sick leave for the entire workday. An employee scheduled to take pre-approved leave after his or her *early dismissal time* (e.g., for a doctor's appointment) may not be charged leave for that period. Instead, the employee should be granted excused absence for the remainder of the workday following his or her *early dismissal time*.

Employee on official travel. An employee who is on official travel during normal

working hours when an agency dismisses its employees early is not entitled to additional pay or paid time off (e.g., compensatory time off or credit hours).

Employee scheduled to return to work. If an employee is scheduled to return from leave after an **early dismissal policy** is announced, the agency should charge leave for the period prior to the employee's *early dismissal time* and grant excused absence for the remainder of the workday following the employee's *early dismissal time*.

Employee who teleworks from a remote location. Depending on the employing agency's policy, an employee who teleworks from a remote location may be required to continue working through any dismissal or closure of his or her regular worksite. If the agencies in the area of the employee's telework site announce an **early dismissal policy** because of adverse weather conditions (e.g., a snow emergency), the employee is expected to work at his or her telework site or request annual leave, other paid time off, or leave without pay, unless the employee is instructed otherwise by the employing agency.

IV. OPM's Responsibilities and Agencies' 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 (METRO). OPM officials will consult with various officials, including appropriate DC 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 will be based on 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 and Human Resources Directors of any decision to **close** Federal agencies, or announce an **unscheduled leave policy**, a **delayed arrival policy**, or an **early dismissal policy**. Information will be available at http://www.opm.gov/Operating_Status_Schedules. (See also Section V, Status of Government Operations, of these procedures.)

Agencies' 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 employees of the procedures for requesting leave when an **unscheduled leave policy** is announced. When an **unscheduled leave policy** is announced, employees must notify their supervisors of their intent to take unscheduled leave.
3. At least annually, agencies should identify *emergency employees* and notify them in writing. The written notice should include the requirement that *emergency employees* report for or remain at work (or report to an alternative worksite) when Government operations are disrupted and an explanation that dismissal or closure announcements do not apply to them unless they are instructed otherwise. 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. At least annually, agencies should identify *mission-critical emergency employees* and notify them in writing. Further, agencies must identify the emergency situations in which such employees will be expected to report for work and notify

them of this policy. Agencies should direct *mission-critical emergency employees* to report for work at their regular worksite or an alternative worksite. *Mission-critical emergency employees* are expected to remain in contact with their employing agencies at all times during any dismissal or closure situation.

5. An agency must include in an employee's written telework agreement any requirement that the *teleworker* continue to work at his or alternative worksite on his or her teleworkday or on any of the employee's regularly scheduled workdays when the agency is closed. At least annually, agencies should remind all teleworkers of this requirement.
6. 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 at the agency's discretion. (See Failure To Report for Work.) In unique situations, an agency may determine that circumstances justify excusing an *emergency employee* or non-emergency employee from duty, and he or she may be granted excused absence.
7. 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. Agencies may use the guidance in 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/oca/aws/index.htm>.

V. Status of Government Operations

The following table summarizes the announcements OPM will provide to the media when there is a disruption of Government operations:

STATUS OF GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

DISRUPTIONS BEFORE THE WORKDAY BEGINS

The U.S. 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. <i>Employees must notify their supervisors of their intent to take unscheduled leave.</i> <i>Emergency employees</i> 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. <i>Teleworkers</i> are expected to report for work on time. <i>Emergency employees</i> are expected to report for work on time.

Announcement	What Announcement Means
<p>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.”</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>Employees who cannot report for work may request unscheduled leave for their entire scheduled workday.</p> <p><i>Teleworkers</i> are expected to report for work on time.</p> <p><i>Emergency employees</i> are expected to report for work on time.</p>
<p>5. “Federal agencies in the Washington, DC, area are CLOSED.”</p>	<p>Federal agencies in the Washington, DC, area are closed. 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, leave without pay for military duty, workers’ compensation, suspension, or in another nonpay status.</p> <p><i>Teleworkers</i> may be expected to work from their telework sites, as specified in their telework agreements.</p> <p><i>Emergency employees</i> are expected to report for work on time.</p> <p>Employees on alternative work schedules are not entitled to another AWS day off in lieu of the workday on which the agency is closed.</p>

DISRUPTIONS AFTER THE WORKDAY BEGINS

The U.S. 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 <i>early dismissal time</i> will be charged annual leave or leave without pay from the time of their departure through the remainder of their regularly scheduled workday. Employees on pre-approved leave for the entire workday or employees who requested unscheduled leave should be charged leave for the entire day.</p> <p><i>Teleworkers</i> may be expected to continue to work from their telework sites, as specified in their telework agreements.</p> <p><i>Emergency employees</i> are expected to remain at work.</p>

Appendix

Extended Emergency Situations

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. This information is available at <http://www.opm.gov/emergency>. In addition, the following fact sheets and *Handbook*, available on OPM's website, offer further guidance on continuing operations during extended emergencies:

Handbook On Pay and Leave Benefits For Federal Employees Affected By Severe Weather Emergencies or Other Emergency Situations

[http://www.opm.gov/oca/compmemo/2008/HandbookForEmergencies\(PayAndLeave\).pdf](http://www.opm.gov/oca/compmemo/2008/HandbookForEmergencies(PayAndLeave).pdf)

Emergency Situations That Prevent Employees From Reporting for Work

<http://www.opm.gov/oca/compmemo/2003/PreventEmpsReportingforWork.asp>

Emergency Situations That Restrict Employees To Their Agency's Premises ("Shelter in Place")

<http://www.opm.gov/oca/compmemo/2003/ShelterInPlace.asp>

Furloughs Due To Extended Emergencies

<http://www.opm.gov/oca/compmemo/2003/Furloughs.asp>



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