May 30, 2007

The Honorable Henry A. Waxman
Chairman, Committee on Oversight and
Government Reform
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

On behalf of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), I am responding to your letter of May 7, 2007, requesting information about telework programs at the NRC. Specific responses to your questions are provided in the enclosure to this letter. This information was also provided to the Office of Personnel Management in March 2007 as part of the "Call for Telework Data 2006."

As you may know, the NRC recently received the top score among large Federal agencies in the "2007 Best Places to Work in the Federal Government" rankings prepared by the Partnership for Public Service and the American University Institute for the Study of Public Policy Implementation. The NRC's telework program is a major contributor to the agency's ranking as the "Best Place to Work in the Federal Government." The flexibility provided by the telework program allows NRC employees to work one or more days a week from home, improving both the efficiency and effectiveness of the agency and the morale of NRC employees. The Commission and Senior Management actively support the telework program and routinely encourage the staff to participate.

As the Commission plans for the future, we expect to recruit 400 new employees annually over the next few years to offset expected retirements and to ensure that the NRC has the workforce necessary to review nearly twenty applications for new reactor licenses expected to begin arriving this fall. Recruiting top-tier, highly skilled employees needed to accomplish NRC's mission is a major NRC priority, and NRC Senior Managers are committed to ensuring that the agency remains responsive to employee needs and that the NRC workforce remains innovative and effective.

To further enhance the telework program, the NRC recently established a Telework Working Group to examine agency needs related to telework in the areas of information technology infrastructure, information security, and budget and facilities, and to develop recommendations that address current and continuing telework objectives. Once the group's work is complete, NRC management will review the recommendations to identify enhancements to the telework program, including possible expansion. The NRC is committed to improving its telework program and making it available to as many employees as possible.

Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

/RA/

Dale E. Klein

Enclosure:
As stated

Identical letter sent to:

The Honorable Henry A. Waxman
Chairman, Committee on Oversight and
Government Reform
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Danny K. Davis
Chairman, Subcommittee on Federal Workforce,
Postal Service, and the District of Columbia
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kenny Marchant
Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on Federal Workforce,
Postal Service, and the District of Columbia
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Tom Davis
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

NRC RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS FROM U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM DATED MAY 7, 2007, REGARDING NRC'S TELEWORK PROGRAM

The information provided in response to the following questions was also provided in March 2007 to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) as part of their "Call for Telework Data 2006." To collect telework information related to employee eligibility and staff participation rates, the NRC performs an annual survey of coordinators in each organization. The usage numbers for telework should be consistent with this data, as we do not see much fluctuation in the number of employees utilizing telework.

ELIGIBILITY QUESTIONS

QUESTION 1.

How does the agency define telework?

ANSWER

The NRC uses OPM's definition. Telework is defined as "work arrangements in which an employee regularly performs officially assigned duties at home or other work sites geographically convenient to the residence of the employee."

QUESTION 2.

What criteria does the agency use to determine whether an employee is eligible to telework? Do employees have to meet any specific requirements before becoming eligible for telework?

ANSWER

The NRC maintains a fixed-schedule telework program (Flexiplace). Flexiplace work schedules can be established on a long-term (fixed) basis or on a short-term (project) basis. Participants in the Flexiplace program on either a fixed or project basis must be on a permanent appointment upon entry into the program as well as maintain a performance rating of at least "fully successful" in all critical elements of their performance appraisals while participating in the program. Participants must also, regardless of performance rating, demonstrate and maintain acceptable work habits, conduct, and adherence to agency policies to justify participation. In addition, positions eligible for the fixed-schedule Flexiplace Program are limited to those:

- with duties that are portable for a minimum of one day per week;
- that can be effectively performed outside of the traditional office setting;
- that are quantifiable or measurable (e.g., project-oriented deliverables); and
- where an employee's absence from the work site does not unduly interfere with the efficient operation of the organization (e.g., office coverage).

Enclosure

QUESTION 3.

How does the agency determine whether an employee is eligible? Is it determined on a case-by-case basis or based on an employee's position or category of employment?

ANSWER

Information regarding an NRC employee's eligibility to participate in the Flexiplace Program is provided in response to Question 2.

QUESTION 4.

Are any categories of employees excluded from eligibility and if so, which ones and why?

ANSWER

Managers and supervisors are excluded from participation in the fixed-schedule Flexiplace Program. In addition, other positions generally excluded from the fixed-schedule Flexiplace Program would include those:

- that routinely or regularly deal with classified or sensitive documents or information;
- that are site specific;
- that require frequent or regular access to equipment or material that cannot be moved from the office setting; or
- that require frequent or regular face-to-face interaction with others.

QUESTION 5.

Please provide the current number of agency employees, including how many are full-time employees and how many are part-time employees. How many employees are eligible for telework?

ANSWER

As of April 28, 2007, the NRC consists of 3,345 permanent, full-time employees. Additionally, the NRC has 100 employees in permanent part-time positions. Any employee whose job responsibilities and performance satisfy the requirements described in the response to Question 2 may participate in the NRC's fixed-schedule Flexiplace Program. The NRC does not maintain a specific accounting of the number of positions eligible for the program.

QUESTION 6.

How many employees are excluded from eligibility? Of those, how many are excluded because they fall into an excluded category and how many are excluded based on an individual reason (i.e., performance)?

ANSWER

Although the NRC does not maintain a specific accounting of employees who are ineligible for participation in the Flexiplace Program, we estimate there are approximately 850 employees excluded from eligibility due to their job responsibilities. Please see response to Question 2 for an explanation of positions eligible for the NRC's fixed-schedule Flexiplace Program. At this time, we have no exclusions based on performance.

QUESTION 7.

What specific measures, if any, are taken to make employees aware of the agency's telework program?

a. Are eligible employees notified individually of their eligibility to participate?

b. If so, how are the employees notified?

ANSWER

The NRC maintains a Telework Web Page on our internal website for employees with information about telework and how to apply for the Flexiplace Program. The NRC does not individually notify employees of their eligibility to participate. Instead, we encourage an open dialogue between first-line supervisors and their staff regarding whether an employee meets the requirements for participation in the program.

QUESTION 8.

How many agency employees are in positions eligible for telework?

a. Of those, how many employees are eligible for telework?

b. How does the agency measure the number of eligible employees?

ANSWER

The NRC estimates that currently there are 2,500 staff positions eligible for telework. Of those, an estimated 2,000 employees are eligible for telework based on our requirements for participation in the fixed-schedule Flexiplace Program. To measure the number of eligible employees, the NRC performs on an annual survey of telework coordinators in each organization.

QUESTION 9.

Are agency employees permitted to telework if they are on an alternative work schedule? For example, if an employee is on a flexible or compressed work schedule, can the employee also telework?

ANSWER

Yes. The NRC does not restrict an employee's participation in the fixed-schedule Flexiplace program based on their participation in a compressed work schedule.

PARTICIPATION QUESTIONS

QUESTION 10.

How does the agency measure the number of employees actually teleworking?

ANSWER

To collect telework information related to staff participation rates, the NRC performs an annual survey of coordinators in each organization.

QUESTION 11.

How many agency employees telework?

a. OPM defines core telework as "telework that occurs on a routine, regular, and recurring basis away from an employee's principal place of duty . . . one or more days per week." How many employees are core teleworkers? Please provide the average number of days per month that employees telework on a core basis as well as the total distribution of days that employees telework per month on a core basis.

b. How many employees are situational (non-core) teleworkers? Please provide the average number of days per month that employees telework on a situational basis as well as the total distribution of days that employees telework per month on a situational basis.

ANSWER

Based on the most recent survey completed, the NRC estimates that 250 employees are participating in the Flexiplace Program on a fixed-schedule basis. Of those 250 employees, 235 telework 1 or 2 days each week and the other 15 telework 3 or more days a week. In addition, although we do not maintain a specific accounting of participation rates in the NRC's Flexiplace Program on a project basis, we know from first-line supervisors and employee feedback that this is a very popular option. Many employees feel that the project-based approach provides added flexibility to adjust their schedules when projects that are highly conducive to telework are received. Given the flexibility with which supervisors and employees use the project-based approach to accomplish the NRC's mission, we do not attempt to track its usage. We instead focus our attention on promoting its use and encouraging supervisors and employees to identify appropriate projects that can be completed while teleworking.

BARRIER QUESTIONS

QUESTION 12.

What efforts is the agency taking to identify barriers to telework? What barriers have been identified?

ANSWER

To enhance further our telework program, the NRC recently established a Telework Working Group to examine agency needs related to telework in the areas of information technology infrastructure, information security, budget and facilities, and to develop recommendations that address current and continuing telework objectives. Once the group's work is complete, NRC management will review the recommendations to identify enhancements to the telework program, including possible expansion.

QUESTION 13.

What specific measures have been taken to overcome those barriers?

ANSWER

As described in the response to Question 12, once the Telework Working Group completes its review of the NRC's Flexiplace Program, including the identification of any barriers, NRC management will review the group's recommendations to identify enhancements to the program that will include minimizing any barriers to employee participation.

QUESTION 14.

What efforts are being made to address any management resistance to telework?

ANSWER

While the NRC believes that our management is very supportive of the Flexiplace Program, one of the goals of the Telework Working Group is to identify any telework barriers, including potential management resistance. If the working group identifies that such a barrier exists, NRC management will review the working group's recommendations and make appropriate changes to minimize or eliminate this barrier.

QUESTION 15.

Is agency management required to receive telework training? If so, what type of training is required and who is required to receive the training?

ANSWER

The NRC does not require managers and supervisors to receive telework training. However, we do offer the OPM online training courses, “Telework 101 for Employees” and “Telework 101 for Managers,” to interested managers and employees. NRC Senior Management continues to communicate the need to support telework across the agency, both verbally and in writing.

CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS PLANNING QUESTIONS

QUESTION 16.

Has the agency incorporated telework into its continuity of operations planning? If so, how has telework been incorporated?

ANSWER

Telework is being incorporated into our continuity of operations planning. The NRC recently added a Telework Annex to our Continuity of Operations Plan.

QUESTION 17.

Has the agency performed a demonstration exercise using telework as a component of continuity of operations planning? If so, did the exercise incorporate telework opportunities for both essential and nonessential personnel?

ANSWER

At this time, the NRC has not performed a demonstration exercise; however, we may consider it in future exercises.

QUESTION 18.

Has the agency actually used telework to respond to an emergency? What was the situation and how was telework utilized?

ANSWER

Fortunately, the NRC has not had a need to use telework to respond to an emergency because we have not had an emergency.