

COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA TELECOMMUTING POLICY

Policy

Telecommuting is the practice of working at home or at an alternative work site for some portion of an employee's work hours. The County of Santa Barbara considers this option, when appropriately undertaken, to be of value to both the County and the individual employee.

Principles

Telecommuting is a cooperative venture between the Department and employee based on the needs of the Department and the past and present performance of the employee. Telecommuting is neither a right nor an entitlement, but a tool to allow flexibility in work options.

By reducing peak traffic congestion, this program can improve air quality and reduce the parking demand; improve employment opportunities for those with restricted mobility or disabilities, and provide alternative work sites in case of disaster.

Terms and conditions of employment with the County of Santa Barbara remain the same regardless of work site. Jobs with clearly defined tasks and work products are most suitable for this program as performance is measured by output.

A telecommuting agreement is a voluntary, joint decision between Department and employee and may be terminated by either the Department or the employee.

Equipment and materials provided by the County to be used at home remain the property of the County.

Goals

- To retain highly motivated employees;
- To assist in traffic reduction and the improvement of air quality;
- To promote the efficient use of resources;
- To increase the effective use of individual work time;

Selection Criteria

Four selection criteria should be considered when assessing the feasibility of telecommuting in a particular work group: the characteristics of the job, the individual, the supervisor, and the proposed remote work site.

Job Characteristics

- Communication requirements which can be met by telephone, voice mail or electronic mail at a minimum cost to the County, rather than face to face communication.
- An individual presently working alone with information such as writing, reading, planning, computer programming, word processing and data entry.
- Work products with identifiable time frames and measurable work activities with clearly defined tasks.
- Tasks that require concentration and/or blocks of time when the employee works independently.
- Minimal special equipment requirements.

Employee Characteristics

The best telecommuters are strong performers with a high knowledge of job requirements and who are self-disciplined, highly motivated, and comfortable working alone.

- High job knowledge and proven high productivity.
- Self-discipline, self-direction and motivation.
- Above average skills in planning, organizing, managing time, and meeting objectives.
- Ability to maintain regular work relationships and close communication with supervisor and co-workers.
- A desire to make telecommuting work.

Supervisor Characteristics

The role of the supervisor is a third criterion essential to the success of a telecommuting arrangement. Certain traits have been found to be helpful:

- Good management skills, flexibility in management style, ability to manage by results rather than by the clock.
- Above average organization and planning skills.
- A provider of regular feedback to employees; mutual trust and respect with the telecommuter; a facilitator of open communication.
- Establishment and communication of clear objectives and performance criteria.
- An open, positive attitude toward telecommuting.

Remote Site Related Criteria

- Adequate office space with appropriate lighting.
- Such computer equipment and software, required by and arranged with the Department.
- Telephone service to the remote site with effective answering machine or voice mail.
- Security issues agreed upon and resolved.
- Minimal interruptions.

Management Guidelines

1. Telecommuting is voluntary and may be terminated by employee, supervisor or department head at any time. Non-selection or revocation of the privilege of participating is at the discretion of the appointed authority or his/her designee. Telecommuting arrangements shall not be terminated for arbitrary or capricious reasons.
2. Telecommuters and their supervisors remain obligated to comply with all County of Santa Barbara rules, regulations, policies, procedures, MOU provisions and the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). The violation of any of the above or the misuse of County time or any County-provided equipment may result in preclusion from telecommuting and/or disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.
3. Telecommuting occurs on a part-time or periodic basis which is agreed upon with the telecommuter's Department. Requests to work overtime and use of leave balances (i.e. sick, vacation, compensatory time, administrative leave, or other types of leave) must be pre-approved by the telecommuter's supervisor in the same manner as when working in the regular office.
4. The duties, obligations and responsibilities of a telecommuter are not changed by telecommuting. The employee's salary, retirement, benefits and insurance coverage do not change as a result of telecommuting.
5. Telecommuters will be as accessible as their on-site counterparts during their agreed upon regular business hours, regardless of work location. Arrangements for flexible work schedules are subject to supervisor's approval. Telecommuters and their supervisors must agree on how the telecommuter can ensure accessibility to departmental staff, and the expected response time for returning phone calls. The telecommuter will provide a home telephone number to his/her supervisor, as well as to other essential departmental staff.
6. The telecommuters' home address and telephone number will remain confidential and will not be released to the public or any other unauthorized persons.
7. Telecommuters who work at home will have a designated work space agreed to by the County and maintained by the telecommuter. Telecommuters will be responsible for the ergonomics of their remote offices as well as maintaining a safe condition free from hazards. With at least 24 hours advanced notice, an official representative of the County may make on-site visitation to the designated work area to ensure that safe working conditions exist.
8. Telecommuting is not a substitute for dependent care. If a person (child, spouse, elder, or other person(s) is relying on the employee for physical or emotional care, then the employee is likely to be unable to fully and effectively devote his or her time to work assignments. The telecommuter must ensure that dependent care is provided for in a way approved by the department that allows the telecommuter to successfully fulfill his or her job responsibilities.
9. Telecommuters will work at the designated location during the hours agreed upon. Employee will not work elsewhere unless prior approval is obtained from the Department.
10. Telecommuters agree not to engage in employment activities other than those approved by their Department nor in activities other than County assignments during telecommuting hours.
11. Telecommuters will take all precautions necessary to secure privileged information and prevent unauthorized access to any County of Santa Barbara system.

12. Telecommuters may need equipment such as a computer, modem, printer, FAX or telephone line, as well as ergonomic workstations, chairs, etc. The Department Head at his/her discretion, may provide Employees with such equipment/furnishings and/or may pay for telecommunications expenses. If the County agrees to provide the equipment/furniture at the County's expense, then such equipment/furniture will remain the property of the County of Santa Barbara.
13. Telecommuter's tax implications related to the home work space are the responsibility of the employee. Telecommuters are advised to discuss any issues with their tax advisor.
14. The County's worker's compensation liability for job-related accidents will continue to exist during the employee's telecommuting work hours. Any work related injury should be immediately reported to the telecommuter's supervisor.
15. The telecommuter remains liable for injuries to third persons and members of the employee's family on the employee's premises. The County of Santa Barbara is not liable for damage to the employee's real property.
16. Telecommuting expenses not specifically covered in this policy will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis between employee and Department.
17. Telecommuters and their department will jointly sign a Telecommuting Agreement that can be terminated at any time by either the department or the employee. Telecommuters and supervisors should identify specific goals, completion dates and measurements for success. Both the telecommuter and the supervisor have the responsibility of ensuring that the identified tasks are completed in the same quality manner and with the same timeliness commensurate to the work done in the office.
18. Each telecommuting arrangement should be mutually agreed upon by the department and the employee.
19. The department may, at any time, change any or all of the conditions under which employees are permitted to telecommute.

Timekeeping, Reporting, and Liability

All County of Santa Barbara policies regarding attendance and hours worked also apply to telecommuting employees.

The telecommuter and his/her supervisor should agree upon a work schedule. Unless a different work schedule is designated, telecommuters are assumed to be available from 8am to 5pm Monday through Friday.

Telecommuters generally spend the entire telecommuting day at the same remote work location. Only travel specifically authorized by the telecommuter's supervisor will be considered business travel eligible for reimbursement. Establishing a remote work location in the telecommuter's home does not make the telecommuter's regular commute to his/her primary employment location a business trip.

Overtime

It is expected that employees may sometimes be required to work beyond the customary 40 hours per week to ensure successful completion of job responsibilities. This applies to telecommuters as well as on-site employees. For all employees who are not exempt under FLSA and who are entitled to pay or compensatory overtime, **overtime work must be pre-authorized by the supervisor.**

Performance Guidelines

A major concern for some will be the supervising and performance evaluation of off-site employees. When it comes to evaluating off-site employees work, primary criteria should be:

- Quality of work.
- Timely completion of projects.
- Maintenance of close communication.

Measuring Job Performance

A successful performance evaluation process requires that supervisors and employees jointly set clear performance objects, including:

- Identifying the specific tasks and work objectives to be accomplished during a performance cycle.
- Establishing how to measure the objectives.
- Prioritizing work by identifying those results most crucial and those that can be deferred.
- Analyzing how objectives support work goals.

Security

Data and information used by telecommuters must be treated with the same caution and respect that confidential material is given in the office. The Telecommuter should be particularly aware of the following areas regarding security:

1. Any and all papers with confidential information must be treated accordingly.
2. Any confidential data stored on a computer at the employee's home must be protected as appropriate.
3. If the employee will be transferring data from a PC located at home to one located at the office, the employee must be aware of the potential to spread computer viruses from home to the office.
4. If the employee uses a computer at home to remotely access a computer or computer system at the office, the employee must be aware of the risks associated with the transfer of or access to confidential data.
5. It is incumbent upon the employee to protect any passwords or secure access devices associated with the County's computer system.