

ARS □ CSREES □ ERS □ NASS

Policies and Procedures

Title: Use of Information Technology Resources

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Distribution: All REE Employees

This P&P defines acceptable and unacceptable uses of information technology (IT) resources such as telephones, E-mail, facsimile machines, cellular telephones and Internet services. **This was modified on July 8, 2002, to apply the same rules to cellular phones as are in place for land-line phones.**

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1. Introduction

Agencies provide REE employees with information technology (IT) resources (e.g., PCs, E-mail, telephones, facsimile machines, copiers, office equipment, Internet access, etc.) to support mission accomplishment and enhance the efficient and effective delivery of services to agency customers. This P&P describes appropriate use of these resources and establishes conditions under which employees may use IT resources for non-Government purposes.

2. General Policy

Introduction

IT resources may only be used for authorized purposes. However, “limited personal use of Government office equipment by employees during personal time is considered to be an ‘authorized use’ of Government property”, according to Departmental Regulation (DR) 3300-1, dated March 23, 1999. In the REE agencies, “limited personal use” is use that involves minimal additional expense to the Government, is performed on the employee’s personal time, and does not interfere with the mission or operations of an agency.

Employees are expected to abide by this and other rules and regulations and to be responsible for their own personal and professional conduct. The Standards of Ethical Conduct state “employees shall put forth honest effort in the performance of their duties” (Section 2635.101 (b)(5)).

Supervisors have the management authority and responsibility to ensure the appropriate use of resources within their organizations. This includes IT resources and official employee time. As such, employees should consult with their supervisors regarding authorized use of IT resources and interpretation of this P&P. The privilege to use Government office equipment for non-Government purposes may be revoked or limited at any time by supervisors or other appropriate agency officials.

It is encouraged to manage telecommunications services in accordance with DR 3300-1 (Telecommunications & Internet Services and Use), and other pertinent laws and regulations. DR 3300-1 can be found at URL: <http://www.usda.gov/ocio/directives/DR/DR3300-001.htm>

Personnel traveling (domestic and international) should review the Departmental Regulation 2300-003 (Authorized Telephone Calls of a Personal Nature During Official Travel), prior to traveling and claiming expenses. DR 2300-003 can be found at URL: <http://www.usda.gov/ocio/directives/DR/DR2300-003.htm>

Acceptable Personal Use

Employees are permitted limited use of Government office equipment for personal needs if the use does not interfere with official business and involves minimal additional expense to the Government. This limited personal use of Government office equipment should take place during the employee's personal time, such as before or after duty hours or lunch periods.

Personal use of Government office equipment is limited to situations where the Government is already providing equipment or services and the employee's use of them will result in only minimal additional expense to the Government. This would include normal wear and tear or the use of small amounts of electricity, ink, toner, or paper.

Unacceptable Personal Use

Employees are expected to conduct themselves professionally in the workplace and to refrain from using Government office equipment for activities that are inappropriate. Unacceptable personal use of Government IT resources includes:

- Any use that could generate more than minimal additional expense to the Government.
- Any use that could cause congestion, delay, or disruption of service to any Government system or equipment. For example, the forwarding of "chain" e-mails, e-mailing greeting cards, or downloading of video, sound or other large file attachments can degrade the performance of the entire network.
- Activities that are illegal or offensive to fellow employees or the public. Examples include pornography, hate speech, or material that ridicules others on the basis of race, creed, religion, color, sex, disability, national origin, or sexual orientation.
- Any use for commercial purposes or "for-profit" activities such as outside employment or to support a personal private business activity (e.g., consulting for pay, sales, or administration of business transactions, sale of goods or services).
- Engaging in any outside fund-raising activity, endorsing any product or service, participating in any lobbying activity, or engaging in any prohibited partisan political activity.

3. Telephone Equipment and Services

Acceptable Personal Use

The use of Government telephone systems (including government issued cellular telephones and calls over commercial systems which will be paid for by the Government) are in place for the conduct of official business or limited personal use as outlined above in General Policy. Calls

may be made using Government-issued wireless phone service when policies outlined for land-line phones are followed. The use of cellular technology at the expense of the government does not preclude the user from having the responsibility for inventory control, billing and accountability.

Employees may make the following personal calls at Government expense:

- Brief daily calls to locations within the local commuting area to check the condition of your spouse or children.
- Calls to your family, your doctor, etc., if you are hurt on the job.
- Calls to advise your family and/or to make other transportation or child care arrangements if you must work overtime without advance notice.
- Calls to business offices open only during the work day.
- Calls to schedule emergency home or car repairs.
- Calls to your home once a day while on Government travel/business.
- Calls to your home while on Government travel/business to advise your family of travel changes or delays.

Employees may make personal calls **not** at Government expense if the call is:

- charged to your home phone number or other non-Government number;
- made to an 800, 877, 888, or other toll-free number;
- charged to the called party if a non-Government number (collect call); or
- charged to a personal credit card or prepaid calling card.

Unacceptable Personal Use

Unacceptable use includes:

- Making an unauthorized telephone call with the intent to later reimburse the Government.
- Use of “900” calls to include dialing a toll free number which will switch to a “900” call, either on or off the FTS2001/WorldCom network.

- Collect calls and third party calls charged to a Government number.

4. E-mail

Acceptable Personal Use

Acceptable E-mail messages include:

- Occasional personal messages.
- Inquiries about your salary, insurance, retirement, or other employee benefits.

Unacceptable Personal Use

Unacceptable uses of E-mail include:

- The creation, copying, or transmission of “junk mail” such as chain letters, hoaxes, advertisements, solicitations, or other unauthorized mass mailings.
- Spreading computer viruses warnings (hoaxes). While these hoaxes do not infect systems, they are time consuming and costly to handle. You should be especially alert if the warning urges you to pass it on to your friends. Forward these messages to your Information Systems Security Officer for evaluation.
- Engaging in any outside fund-raising activities.
- Sending large attachments that degrade system performance.

5. Internet

Acceptable Personal Use

Acceptable uses of the Internet during employee personal time include:

- Accessing the Employee Personal Page or the Thrift Savings Plan to check balances or make changes.
- Communicating with a volunteer charity organization.
- Looking at vacancy announcements.

- Collecting information for personal travel or other such personal activities.

Unacceptable Personal Use

Unacceptable uses of the Internet include:

- The creation, downloading, viewing, storage, or copying of sexually explicit or sexually oriented materials.
- The creation, downloading, viewing, storage, copying, or transmission of materials related to gambling, weapons, terrorist activities, and any other illegal or prohibited activities.
- Posting agency information to external news groups, bulletin boards, or other public forums without authority. This includes any use that could create the perception that the communication was made in one's official capacity as a Federal Government employee, unless appropriate agency approval has been obtained.
- Using Government systems as a staging ground or platform to gain unauthorized access to other systems.
- The unauthorized acquisition, use, reproduction, transmission, and distribution of computer software or other material protected by national and international copyright laws, trademarks, or other intellectual property rights.
- Participating in chat rooms.

6. Facsimile Machines, Copiers, and Printers

Acceptable Personal Use

Examples of acceptable use of facsimile machines, copiers, and printers include:

- Occasional use of fax calls to locations within the local commuting area. Fax calls outside the local commuting area are authorized only if not charged to the Government (see Telephone section).
- Making a few photocopies.
- Using a printer to print a few pages of material.

Unacceptable Personal Use

Unacceptable use of facsimile machines, copiers, and printers include:

- Making long distance fax calls at Government expense.
- Making more than a minimal amount of photocopies, making photocopies of illegal or offensive material, or making photocopies for commercial or “for-profit” purposes.

7. Sanctions for Misuse

Unauthorized or improper use of IT resources may result in loss or limitations on use of equipment or services, disciplinary action, criminal penalties, or financial liability for the costs of the use.

8. Privacy Expectations

Each agency has the responsibility to ensure that employees are not abusing the privileges offered by this policy. The policy does not change, in any way, the agency’s right to inspect equipment when there is evidence or a strong suspicion that an employee is abusing this policy.

Employees do not have a right to, nor should they expect, privacy while using any Government office equipment at any time. To the extent that employees wish their private activities remain private, they should avoid using an agency’s office equipment, such as their computer, the Internet, E-mail, photocopiers, or facsimile machines, or cellular or land-line phones, for their personal use. By using Government office equipment employees imply their consent to disclosing the contents of any files or information maintained or passed through Government office equipment. Any use of Government communications resources is made with the understanding that such use is generally not secure, is not private, and is not anonymous.

System managers do employ monitoring tools to detect improper usage. Electronic communications may be disclosed within an agency to employees who have a need to know in the performance of their duties. Agency officials, such as system managers and supervisors, may access any electronic communications.

SAFETY

Current Federal policy (GSA Bulletin FMR B-2, March 1, 2002) outlines policy for the use of cellular phones in motor vehicles. It is recommended while operating a Personal vehicle and/or Government vehicle, and you need to make or answer a telephone call that you safely pull the vehicle to the side of the road and bring the vehicle to a complete stop, until you have completed the telephone call. Some state and city laws prohibit the use of cellular telephones while operating a vehicle. Employees are not exempt from these laws.

9. Summary of Responsibilities

Supervisors

- Counsel employees and monitor their use of IT resources to ensure those resources are being used appropriately.
- Immediately notify the servicing Employee Relations Specialist when they are made aware of potential misuse of Government IT resources.

Employee Relations Specialists

- Determine whether misuse is indicated based on appropriate law, rule, regulation, or agency policy.
- Conduct an inquiry/investigation into the extent of the misuse of IT resource(s).
- Provide advice and guidance on appropriate disciplinary action.

Employees

- Ensure that personal use of IT resources is limited to personal time, does not interfere with official business, and involves minimal additional expense to the Government.
- Notify their immediate supervisor if they have reason to believe IT resources are being used for other than authorized purposes.

10. Glossary

C.F.R. Code of Federal Regulations.

Information Technology. The hardware and software operated by a Federal agency or by a contractor of a Federal agency or other organization that processes information on behalf of the

Federal Government to accomplish a Federal function, regardless of the technology involved, whether computers, telecommunications, or others.

Information Technology (IT) Resources. Computers, computer peripherals, hardware, software, printers, cellular and land-line telephone equipment and services, copiers and facsimile machines, electronic mail, and the Internet, owned, leased, or otherwise in the possession of the REE agencies.

Investigation. A formal examination and evaluation of relevant facts to determine whether misconduct has taken place or, if misconduct has already been confirmed, to assess its extent and determine appropriate action.

Minimal Additional Expense. An employee's personal use of Government office equipment is limited to those situations where the Government is already providing equipment or services, and the employee's use of such equipment or services will not result in any additional expense to the Government, or the use will result in only normal wear and tear or the use of small amounts of electricity, ink, toner, or paper.

Personal Use. Activity that is conducted for purposes other than accomplishing official or otherwise authorized activity.

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