

AUDIT REPORT

Audit of NRC's Telework Program

OIG-10-A-13 June 9, 2010



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**UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION**
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20555-0001

**OFFICE OF THE
INSPECTOR GENERAL**

June 9, 2010

MEMORANDUM TO: R. William Borchardt
Executive Director for Operations

FROM: Stephen D. Dingbaum */RA/*
Assistant Inspector General for Audits

SUBJECT: AUDIT OF NRC'S TELEWORK PROGRAM
(OIG-10-A-13)

Attached is the Office of the Inspector General's (OIG) audit report titled, *Audit of NRC's Telework Program*.

The report presents the results of the subject audit. Agency comments provided at the April 30, 2010, exit conference and a subsequent meeting have been incorporated, as appropriate, into this report.

Please provide information on actions taken or planned on each of the recommendations within 30 days of the date of this memorandum. Actions taken or planned are subject to OIG followup as stated in Management Directive 6.1.

We appreciate the cooperation extended to us by members of your staff during the audit. If you have any questions or comments about our report, please contact me at 415-5915 or Kathleen Stetson, Team Leader, Financial and Administrative Audit Team, at 415-8175.

Attachment: As stated

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

In recent years, the Federal Government has taken steps to increase opportunities for employees to telework. Telework is defined as work arrangements in which an employee regularly performs officially assigned duties at home or other worksites geographically convenient to the employee's residence. Telework is also a tool that can be used to ensure continuity of essential Government functions in the event of national or local emergencies.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), Office of Human Resources (HR) Employee/Labor Relations and Work Life Branch, has responsibility for implementing the NRC's telework program in accordance with telework guidelines stated in the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) between NRC and the National Treasury Employees Union, which covers approximately 68 percent of NRC permanent employees. NRC recently renegotiated the telework program guidelines in the CBA, effective November 1, 2009.

This report addresses three categories of telework arrangements that are practiced at NRC: project-based, fixed-schedule, and full-time. Project-based telework is used to complete portable short-term tasks such as writing performance appraisals. The time spent is normally measured in terms of days or hours. Fixed-schedule telework is a regular arrangement to perform portable duties for a specified period of time. For the period 2006-2009, the number of NRC's fixed-schedule teleworkers increased from approximately 200-700. Full-time telework is a type of fixed-schedule telework that occurs when an employee primarily works at an alternate workplace. As of January 2010, 27 employees had either obtained or requested full-time telework.

PURPOSE

The audit objectives were to determine NRC's readiness to have staff telework under emergency situations, the adequacy of internal controls associated with the telework program, and if NRC's telework program complies with relevant law and Office of Personnel Management guidance. Appendix A contains more information on the audit scope and methodology.

RESULTS IN BRIEF

NRC has established a telework program that supports the agency's mission and work/life programs. However, the Office of the Inspector General identified opportunities for program improvements in the following areas:

- Readiness to telework during emergency situations.
- Telework program internal controls.
- Compliance with law.

Readiness to Telework During Emergency Situations

NRC emergency plans require that employees potentially needed to telework during pandemic emergencies be identified and have the equipment needed to telework. However, NRC has not identified all of the individuals needed for teleworking during pandemic emergencies or the methods for accessing information technology systems that are not remotely accessible via Citrix or in the event of a power failure, but are potentially needed for telework to occur. This is because not all NRC offices have made completing the telework aspects of pandemic planning a priority. Without identifying the individuals needed to telework during emergencies and how systems would be accessed for telework during emergencies, the agency's ability to perform mission-related functions in a pandemic emergency is diminished.

Telework Program Internal Controls

Management has the fundamental responsibility to develop and maintain effective internal control over the telework program, such as ensuring that required telework documentation is properly approved, maintained, and readily available for examination. In addition, management is responsible for developing and implementing detailed telework policies and procedures that should appear in a management directive or operating manual. However, NRC is not maintaining complete telework documentation and has not developed or implemented a telework program policy that applies to all agency employees. These internal control weaknesses exist because agency policy and procedures regarding telework are not consolidated into a management directive and handbook. By strengthening internal controls, NRC staff can improve the telework program so that employees will have a common understanding of the program and an increased awareness of opportunities to telework.

Compliance with Law

NRC is required to establish telework policies that provide eligible employees the ability to telework to the maximum extent possible without diminished employee performance. CBA telework eligibility guidance requires that management consider covered employee performance for initial and continued participation. Despite these requirements, managers inconsistently assessed and reported the results of employee arrangements to HR and in some cases did not report the information. Performance was inconsistently assessed and reported because NRC has not established procedures to accomplish a consistent approach. As a result, the agency has no assurance that all employees who telework full-time from alternate worksites are maintaining their expected performance levels.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This report makes recommendations to improve the agency's management of the telework program. A consolidated list of these recommendations appears in Section IV of this report.

AGENCY COMMENTS

At an exit conference on April 30, 2010, agency management stated their general agreement with the findings and recommendations in this report. Agency management also provided supplemental information that has been incorporated into this report as appropriate. As a result, the agency opted not to provide formal comments for inclusion in this report.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CBA	Collective Bargaining Agreement
COOP	Continuity of Operations
GAO	U.S. Government Accountability Office
NRC	Nuclear Regulatory Commission
HR	Office of Human Resources
OIG	Office of the Inspector General
OPM	Office of Personnel Management
PMEF	Primary Mission Essential Functions
PPF	Pandemic Priority Functions

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I. BACKGROUND

In recent years, the Federal Government has taken steps to increase opportunities for employees to telework. Telework is defined as work arrangements in which an employee regularly performs officially assigned duties at home or other worksites geographically convenient to the employee's residence.

The main legislative mandate for telework was established in Public Law 106-346 §359, *Department of Transportation and Related Agencies Appropriations, 2001*, dated October 23, 2000. This legislation requires each executive agency to establish a policy under which eligible employees may telework to the maximum extent possible without diminished employee performance. Subsequent legislation requires that each executive agency ensure the removal of managerial, logistical, and other barriers to full implementation and successful functioning of the policy. Each agency should also provide adequate administrative, human resources, technical, and logistical support for carrying out the policy.

NRC's Telework Program

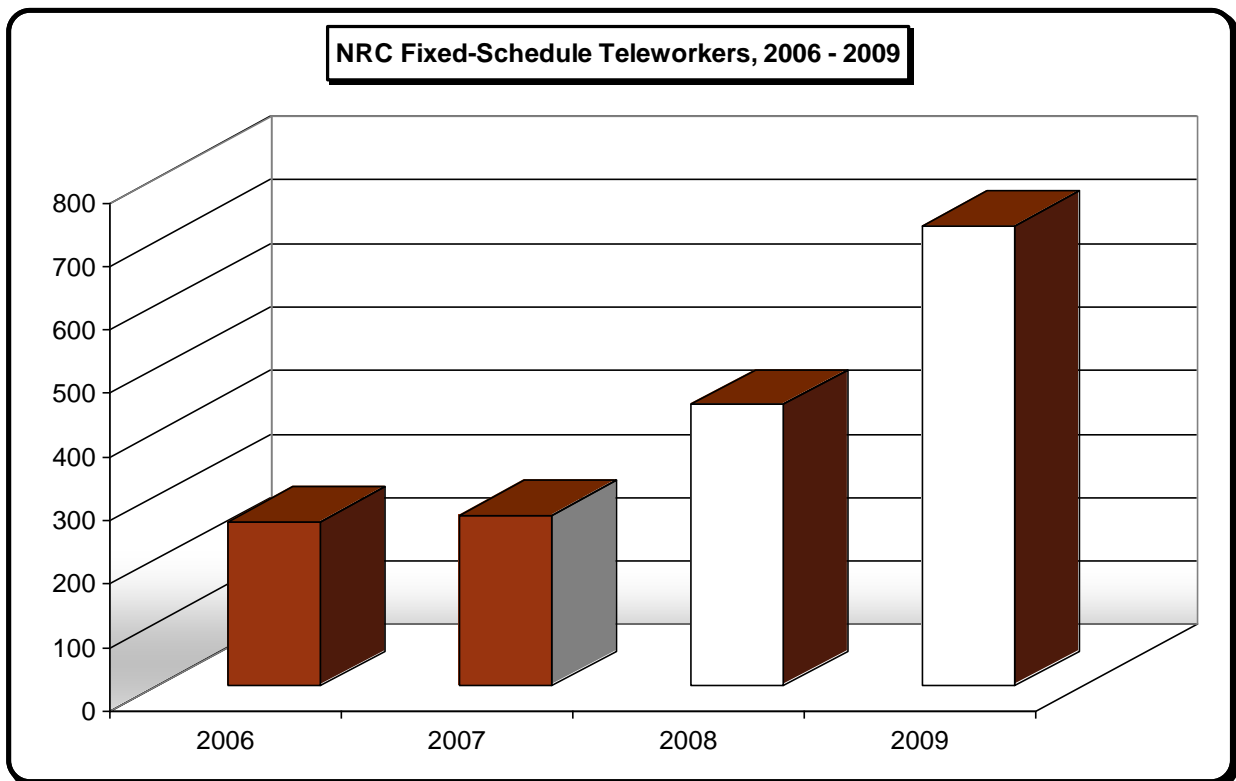
The Office of Human Resources (HR), Employee/Labor Relations and Work Life Branch, has responsibility for implementing the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's (NRC) telework program in accordance with telework guidelines stated in the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) between NRC and the National Treasury Employees Union, which covers approximately 68 percent of NRC permanent employees. NRC recently renegotiated the telework program guidelines in the CBA, effective November 1, 2009.

Staff in multiple NRC offices are involved in NRC telework program implementation. HR has responsibility for developing policy and procedures, including necessary forms, to implement, monitor, evaluate, and otherwise administer the program through the agency telework coordinator, an HR employee, and each office's telework coordinator. The agency telework coordinator monitors the overall progress of the telework program, reports on trends or changes in the agency program and/or telecommuting issues in general to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). The agency telework coordinator also provides program coordination with offices and regions, the Chief Information Officer, the Agency Safety and Health Manager, the Division of Facilities and Security, the Computer Security Office, and the Office of the General Counsel. Each office's telework coordinator gathers data to advise managers, participants, and other interested parties on matters pertaining to program implementation.

Telework Categories

This report addresses three categories of telework arrangements that are implemented at NRC: (1) project-based, (2) fixed-schedule, and (3) full-time.

- Project-based telework is used to complete portable short-term tasks such as writing performance appraisals. The time spent is normally measured in terms of days or hours and supervisors approve employee requests for this type of telework arrangement. Previously, managers approved employee requests for project-based telework verbally or via e-mail. Revised CBA guidance now requires employees to request project-based telework using specific NRC forms. Numerous employees telework on a project basis; however, NRC is not required to track the number of project-based teleworkers.
- Fixed-schedule telework is a regular arrangement to perform portable duties for a specified period of time. Office directors are authorized to approve fixed-schedule telework arrangements for up to 3 days a week. Fixed-schedule telework that exceeds 3 days per week requires HR director approval. The following graph illustrates the number of fixed-schedule teleworkers at NRC.



Source: NRC data as reported to OPM.

- Full-time telework is a type of fixed-schedule telework that occurs when an employee primarily works at an alternate workplace. As of June 2009, HR had approved 18 NRC employees' agreements for telework on a full-time basis. These full-time teleworkers held a range of positions, including, an administrative judge, engineer, cyber-security specialist, employee with specialized information technology skills, and health physicists. They worked varying schedules ranging from 8 to 40 hours per week; part-time employees can be approved to telework on a full-time basis. By January 2010, 27 employees had either obtained or requested full-time telework, reflecting an approximate 50-percent growth in 6 months.

Full-time teleworkers must receive approval for their arrangement from the HR director. The Offices of Information Services, Computer Security, and Administration concur on full-time telework requests to ensure that teleworkers:

- Have the infrastructure services needed to support their telework.
- Will conduct the work assigned in accordance with NRC computer security policy.
- Could be drug tested at an appropriate facility, in accordance with agency policy when selected for random drug testing.

Telework During Emergencies

Telework is one of the tools that can be used to ensure continuity of essential Government functions in the event of national or local emergencies. OPM telework guidance states that managers must include telework in pandemic, as well as, Continuity of Operations (COOP) and other emergency response planning. Emergency planning guidance also cites the benefits of using telework to slow the spread of disease by keeping face-to-face contact to a minimum while at the same time maintaining operations as close to normal as possible. Implementing telework during emergencies helps agencies retain functionality if the main worksite is difficult to access.

II. PURPOSE

The audit objectives were to determine:

- NRC's readiness to have staff telework under emergency situations.
- The adequacy of internal controls associated with the telework program.
- If NRC's telework program complies with relevant law and OPM guidance.

Appendix A contains more information on the audit scope and methodology.

III. FINDINGS

NRC has established a telework program that supports the agency's mission and work/life programs.¹ However, opportunities exist to improve NRC's:

- Readiness to telework during emergency situations.
- Telework program internal controls.
- Compliance with law.

Addressing these areas will improve the management of NRC's telework program as employee use of telework continues to grow.

A. Opportunities Exist To Improve Readiness To Telework in Emergency Situations²

NRC emergency plans require that employees potentially needed to telework during pandemic emergencies be identified and have the equipment needed to telework. However, NRC has not identified all of the individuals needed for teleworking during pandemic emergencies or the methods for accessing information technology systems that are not remotely accessible via Citrix³ or in the event of a power failure, but are potentially needed for telework to occur. This is because not all NRC offices have made completing the telework aspects of pandemic planning a priority. Without identifying the individuals needed to telework during emergencies and how systems would be accessed for telework during emergencies, the agency's ability to perform mission-related functions in a pandemic emergency is diminished.

¹ Work/life programs are human capital tools that help attract and retain employees by allowing them to balance their work and personal or family lives. Telework is one of a variety of tools, along with alternate work schedules, annual and sick leave, childcare subsidy, and preventive health services.

² Although this report focuses on telework during a pandemic emergency, other events envisioned in COOP plans and plans to address other emergencies, including natural and manmade disasters, will necessitate NRC's preparedness to expand telework.

³ Citrix refers to an information technology application that allows employees remote computer access to NRC systems and applications. Citrix supports 1,215 licenses for headquarters and regions combined. This is the total number of users who could be remotely logged into the NRC network.

Emergency Planning Telework Requirements

On November 1, 2005, former President George W. Bush announced the *National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza* and directed all Federal agencies to begin internal planning to ensure readiness in the event of an influenza pandemic. The *NRC Pandemic Plan* consists of (1) an overall agency plan that promulgates agencywide concepts, guidance, and policy and (2) individual office plans that supplement the agency plan with specific procedures and other details specific to their office mission and function. NRC's pandemic plans provide guidance for managing tasks with a decreasing workforce.

Requirement for Identification of Employees and Systems Needed To Perform Essential Functions

The *NRC Pandemic Plan* requires NRC to identify the employees and systems potentially needed to telework during a pandemic emergency. Each headquarters and regional office must develop and implement pandemic related processes and procedures in sufficient detail to execute the agency and office pandemic plans. Offices with responsibilities for performing NRC's essential functions⁴ and the offices responsible for supporting them are required to develop and maintain lists that identify:

- Personnel qualified to perform the functions and who can be reassigned to support other offices.
- Systems required to support those functions.
- Staff and contractors qualified to operate and maintain the support systems.

Information Technology Infrastructure Needed To Telework During a Pandemic Emergency

NRC's Executive Director for Operations delegated overall responsibility for pandemic planning to the Office of Nuclear Security and Incident Response, which formed a Pandemic Task Group that coordinated tasks with offices and regions to ensure adequate telework capability during a pandemic. The Office of Information Services prepared for the Pandemic Task Group a concise description of the practical methods available for working at home and, for each method, the functional, equipment, time, and other limitations on usage. The methods identified for adequate

⁴ These essential functions are those NRC seeks to maintain in a pandemic influenza emergency. Some Pandemic Priority Functions (PPF) are termed "primary mission essential functions" (PMEF) in *NRC's Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plan*. One example of a PPF that is also a PMEF is threat assessment and dissemination, which pertains to communication of safety and security information in an emergency.

telework capability include Citrix access, Webmail (to access NRC e-mail from the Internet), laptops, access to certain sensitive information, Blackberries, work from alternate worksites, and teleconferencing.

Individuals and Methods To Access Information Technology Systems Needed for Telework Not Identified

NRC has not identified (1) all of the individuals needed to telework and (2) the methods for accessing information technology systems that are not remotely available but are potentially needed for telework during pandemic emergencies. Furthermore, the agency has not addressed how it would function in the event of a headquarters power failure, which would make Citrix, Webmail, and other systems needed to support essential functions unavailable.

Individuals Needed To Perform Essential Emergency Functions Not Identified

NRC has not identified all of the individuals needed to carry out essential functions while teleworking during pandemic emergencies. As of October 30, 2009, 21 of 26 offices had not identified personnel who are required to perform essential functions and high priority tasks during a pandemic. Although most offices and regions identified the position titles in their plans, emergency planning guidance states that individuals should be identified. Moreover, the names of the individuals who fill the positions are needed to ensure that these individuals are prepared for their roles prior to an actual emergency. Agency management stated that offices were directed to identify titles rather than individual names so that the lists would remain current due to the turnover.

Information Technology Infrastructure Not Available Remotely

NRC has not completely identified methods for accessing information technology systems needed for telework during pandemic emergencies. NRC employees responsible for performing essential functions in an emergency would need to access systems to carry out their functions while teleworking during an emergency situation; however, not all systems required to support essential functions are available remotely. NRC identified 35 applications/systems⁵ used to carry out the agency's essential functions; however, 28 of the 35 applications/systems are not

⁵ *Data Center Disaster Recovery Planning for U.S Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Task 2 - Business Impact Analysis, June 22, 2009*, contains a matrix that identifies the NRC offices and systems needed to perform essential functions.

accessible on Citrix or any other type of remote access.⁶ Thus, these systems are not available to personnel who telework and compensating plans to use manual or other systems are not in place.

Infrastructure Not Available During a Power Failure

In the event of a headquarters power failure, NRC would be unable to access Citrix, Webmail, and other systems required to support essential functions.⁷ Staff have stated that Citrix access is not necessarily needed for telework. However, some office pandemic plans do not indicate (1) whether employees would use manual methods to continue data collection and (2) once the system/application has been restored, how to work until normal procedures are fully resumed. Even after a system/application becomes available, a mixture of manual (workaround) and normal procedures may be needed before office operations return to normal.

Completing Telework Aspects of Pandemic Planning Not a Management Priority

NRC has not identified all individuals and systems infrastructure potentially needed for telework during pandemic emergencies because the agency has not made completing the telework aspects of pandemic planning a priority. Although NRC was required to start pandemic planning in 2005, the agency has not:

- Developed a plan to identify and remove the information technology barriers to telework.
- Referenced the procedures for teleworking during an emergency within telework guidance.

No Plan Developed To Identify and Remove Information Technology Telework Barriers

In 2009, NRC reported to OPM that one of NRC's major barriers to telework is information technology funding issues; however, NRC did not

⁶ Some systems that support essential functions would be accessed elsewhere in the event of an emergency.

⁷ In the event of some emergencies, 400 Citrix accounts are available through a regional office.

specify what this barrier entails and has not developed a plan to remove the barrier. The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) identified agency efforts that describe information technology telework barriers.⁸ Although HR has coordination responsibilities for the telework program, there has been no coordinated effort within the agency to identify information technology barriers, determine the impact that information technology barriers have on the telework program, and the best method for removing them.

Telework Aspects of Pandemic Planning and Information Technology Tasks Relative to Telework Not Included in Telework Guidance

Telework aspects of pandemic planning and information technology tasks are not referenced in telework guidance. HR has not communicated staff roles concerning emergency planning or information technology requirements needed during emergency situations. For example, *NRC Pandemic Plan*, revised March 2, 2010, contains the form, "Contingency Plan for Telework (Work at Home)." This form is intended to be used as guidance throughout the agency for identifying the specific tasks an employee would perform in order to maintain important functions and services during significant, sustained periods of absenteeism. However, this form does not prompt managers to confirm the employee's contact information, space, telephone, computer equipment, and support needs to facilitate the telework arrangement. Although a copy of this form is in the appendix of the *NRC Pandemic Plan*, it is not referenced in telework program guidance.

Mission Accomplishment Diminished

Without identifying all of the individuals needed to telework and methods for accessing systems infrastructure potentially needed for telework during pandemic emergencies, the agency's ability to perform mission-related functions in a pandemic emergency is diminished. In addition, a power failure would exacerbate the situation and the agency does not have compensating plans in place to use manual or other systems. In effect, the ability of the agency to use telework during a long-term, severe emergency is limited.

⁸ *Report From The Worklife Working Group*, February 11, 2009, recommended that the current NRC telework program be optimized by providing additional focus on program development and infrastructure. This would be accomplished by, among other things, considering information technology needs for teleworkers when upgrading infrastructure such as laptop docking stations, Blackberry devices, and remotely accessible virtual meeting applications to further enhance NRC's telework capability.

Recommendations

OIG recommends that the Executive Director for Operations:

1. Identify all staff with essential functions to facilitate teleworking in an emergency.
2. Identify methods for accessing information technology systems needed to support essential functions during emergencies.
3. Develop manual or other compensating systems to allow telework if access to the agency's information technology systems is not available.
4. Coordinate agency efforts to identify and remove information technology telework barriers, which impede teleworking in an emergency.
5. Reference emergency planning and information technology procedures in telework guidance.

B. Strengthened Internal Control Measures Are Needed To Better Implement the Telework Program

Management has the fundamental responsibility to develop and maintain effective internal control over the telework program, such as ensuring that required telework documentation is properly approved, maintained, and readily available for examination. In addition, management is responsible for developing and implementing detailed telework policies and procedures that should appear in a management directive or operating manual. However, NRC is not maintaining complete telework documentation and has not developed or implemented a telework program policy that applies to all agency employees. These internal control weaknesses exist because agency policy and procedures regarding telework are not consolidated into a management directive and handbook. By strengthening internal controls, NRC staff can improve the telework program so that employees will have a common understanding of the program and an increased awareness of opportunities to telework.

Management Internal Control Responsibilities

Internal control is a significant part of managing a program or organization. U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) standards⁹ provide that management should design and implement detailed program policies and procedures and ensure the accurate recording and documentation of all significant events. In addition, the GAO standards provide that all documentation should be readily available for examination. (Appendix B of this report contains a listing of successful telework program practices and internal controls used by other Federal agencies.)

Telework Program Policy Does Not Clearly Apply to All Employees

NRC has not developed and fully implemented a telework program policy that applies to all agency employees. The agency's telework policy is found in Article 7, *Telework*, of the CBA between NRC and the National Treasury Employees Union. However, the telework policy in the CBA clearly does not cover approximately 32 percent of NRC permanent employees which amounts to 1,255 full-time non-bargaining unit employees. Although in practice, NRC follows the CBA for full-time non-bargaining unit employees, the agency's telework policy should clearly apply to both bargaining unit and non-bargaining unit personnel.

⁹ *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1, November 1999.

Telework Program Policy Does Not Include Key Roles and Responsibilities

The current CBA, which contains the agency's telework program policy, does not contain key roles and responsibilities of personnel who help manage the program. Key roles not included in the current CBA include the agency telework coordinator and office/region telework coordinators. However, roles and responsibilities for these telework personnel were included in the prior CBA. An NRC official stated that these agency responsibilities were not appropriate in a collective bargaining agreement, and thus were excluded from the November 2009 revision. The agency telework coordinator and office telework coordinator responsibilities are not included in any current NRC policies.

NRC Is Not Maintaining Complete Telework Documentation

NRC is not maintaining complete telework documentation in accordance with internal control standards. OIG reviewed files containing the forms required for management to approve telework and found that concurrences (signatures and dates), forms, and files were missing in numerous cases. Specifically,

- Of 18 files reviewed for headquarters and regional full-time teleworkers who primarily work from an alternate duty station, 9 were missing required signatures and another 9 were missing one or more of the necessary forms.
- Of 77 files reviewed of 400 headquarters fixed-schedule teleworkers, 20 office directors did not note the date of their approval.
- Of 17 fixed-schedule teleworkers in one region¹⁰ who telework an average of 1 to 3 days per week, 5 files were missing.

¹⁰ This region has the largest number of fixed-schedule teleworkers.

Table 1 reflects the results of OIG's review of agency telework files.

**Table 1. File Review Results:
Examples of Incomplete Documentation**

Telework Arrangement	NRC Teleworker Universe*	Sample Size	Number of Missing Files	Number of Forms Missing Signatures by Office Directors	Number of Files with Incorrect HR Approvals	Number of Files Missing Forms	Number of Forms Missing Dates by Office Directors
Full-time teleworkers, headquarters and regions	18 **	18 (100%)		9 (50%)	2 (11%)	9 (50%)	
Fixed-schedule teleworkers at headquarters	400	77 (19%)		5 (6%)			20 (26%)
Fixed-schedule teleworkers at one region	17	17 (100%)	5*** (29%)			4 (23%)	

*NRC teleworker universe is an approximation based on information provided by the agency.

**These full-time teleworkers primarily work at home and do not come into the office.

***At the conclusion of the audit, NRC reported that one of the five missing files belonged to a teleworker whose agreement ended in February 2007.

Telework Policy and Procedures Are Not Consolidated into a Management Directive and Handbook

Telework internal control weaknesses occurred because agency telework policy and procedures are not consolidated in a management directive and handbook. According to *NRC Management Directives System, Directive 1.1*, NRC issues management directives and handbooks to communicate NRC policies, requirements, and procedures necessary for the agency to comply with Executive orders, pertinent laws, and regulations. Telework policy and procedures have been developed over a period of time and documented in several sources such as the CBA, Yellow Announcements, internal and external Web sites, and agency telework coordinator handouts. Although these sources for telework information are helpful, consolidation of this guidance into a management directive would better enable managers to access the information needed to consistently implement the program. Moreover, with consolidated guidance, employees would have a better opportunity to reach a common

understanding of the program and an increased awareness of opportunities to telework. Furthermore, the agency would have a telework policy that clearly applies to both bargaining and non-bargaining personnel.

Recommendations

OIG recommends that the Executive Director for Operations:

6. Develop and implement a management directive and handbook for the telework program.
7. Issue consolidated interim telework guidance pending development of a telework program management directive and handbook.

C. Methods To Evaluate Employee Telework Arrangements Need To Be Identified for Compliance with Law

NRC is required to establish telework policies that provide eligible employees the ability to telework to the maximum extent possible without diminished employee performance. CBA telework eligibility guidance requires that management consider covered employee performance for initial and continued participation. Despite these requirements, managers inconsistently assessed and reported the results of employee arrangements to HR and in some cases did not report the information. Performance was inconsistently assessed and reported because NRC has not established procedures to accomplish a consistent approach. As a result, the agency has no assurance that all employees who telework full-time from alternate worksites are maintaining their expected performance levels.

Requirement for Assessing Teleworker Employee Performance

Public Law 106-346¹¹ stipulates that agencies must establish telework policies that allow eligible employees to participate in telework to the maximum extent possible without diminished employee performance. The CBA requires that management consider employee performance to determine initial and continued eligibility to participate in the program.

Inconsistent Assessment and Reporting of Full-Time Teleworker Employee Performance to the Office of Human Resources

Managers inconsistently assessed and reported the results of full-time teleworker employee arrangements to HR. Agreements for some employees to telework full-time from an alternate worksite were approved with the stipulation that the employee's manager assess and report the results of the telework arrangement to HR. However, as of June 11, 2009, the documentation maintained by the agency telework coordinator for the 18¹² HR approved full-time teleworker agreements contained the following performance assessment inconsistencies:

- 7 files contained an agreement for a semiannual evaluation of the arrangement.
- 7 files contained an agreement for an annual evaluation of the arrangement.

¹¹ Public Law 106-346—Oct. 23, 2000, *Department of Transportation and Related Agencies Appropriations, 2001*.

¹² OIG notes that HR provided the file of one employee whose full-time telework agreement was approved as a condition of employment; however the employee did not accept employment at NRC.

- 1 file contained an agreement for an evaluation at the end of the arrangement.
- 3 files did not mention an evaluation of the arrangement.

Based on the agreements for the 17 full-time teleworkers as of June 11, 2009, managers should have provided HR with an evaluation of 8 telework arrangements. However, only two files contained documentation indicating that an assessment had occurred. Of these, one evaluation of the telework arrangement was a multiple-page, detailed description of the tasks performed, while the second described the employee's performance in a single sentence.

No Established Procedures for Assessing and Reporting Full-Time Teleworker Performance

Performance was not consistently assessed and reported because NRC has not established procedures for evaluating the results of the full-time telework arrangement.

No Assurance That Performance Is Being Maintained

Without periodically assessing and reporting the results of the telework arrangement to HR, as stipulated in the telework agreement, NRC has no assurance that employees who telework full-time from an alternate worksite are maintaining expected performance levels.

Recommendation

OIG recommends that the Executive Director for Operations:

8. Develop and implement a procedure for assessing and reporting the results of full-time telework arrangements to the Office of Human Resources.

IV. CONSOLIDATED LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

OIG recommends that the Executive Director for Operations:

1. Identify all staff with essential functions to facilitate teleworking in an emergency.
2. Identify methods for accessing information technology systems needed to support essential functions during emergencies.
3. Develop manual or other compensating systems to allow telework if access to the agency's information technology systems is not available.
4. Coordinate agency efforts to identify and remove information technology telework barriers, which impede teleworking in an emergency.
5. Reference emergency planning and information technology procedures in telework guidance.
6. Develop and implement a management directive and handbook for the telework program.
7. Issue consolidated interim telework guidance pending development of a telework program management directive and handbook.
8. Develop and implement a procedure for assessing and reporting the results of full-time telework arrangements to the Office of Human Resources.

V. AGENCY COMMENTS

At an exit conference on April 30, 2010, agency management stated their general agreement with the findings and recommendations in this report. Agency management also provided supplemental information that has been incorporated into this report as appropriate. As a result, the agency opted not to provide formal comments for inclusion in this report.

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

The audit objectives were to determine (1) NRC's readiness to have staff telework under emergency situations, (2) the adequacy of internal controls associated with the telework program, and (3) if NRC's telework program complies with relevant law and OPM guidance.

To accomplish the audit objectives, OIG obtained and analyzed pertinent laws, regulations, and authoritative guidance, and NRC policies and procedures, including relevant sections of the CBA.

Additionally, OIG reviewed various reports, HR documents, and internal communications and conducted interviews with staff to:

- Gain an understanding of NRC's telework program.
- Determine relevant current issues, problems, and known deficiencies.
- Assess internal controls.

OIG met with the agency's Pandemic Working Group and identified requirements for telework as outlined in the *NRC Pandemic Plan*. OIG also performed a site visit at Region I and performed additional work via telephone related to telework at Region II.

This audit did not include a review of the special circumstances work-at-home policy because this provision is not implemented in accordance with the same public law and collective bargaining agreement provisions as telework.

Internal controls that relate to the audit objectives were reviewed and analyzed. Throughout this audit, auditors were aware of the possibility or existence of fraud, waste, or misuse in NRC's telework program.

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards from May 2009 to February 2010. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on the stated audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on the stated audit objectives.

The work was conducted by Steven Zane, Team Leader; Vicki Foster, Audit Manager; Yvette Mabry, Senior Auditor; Elaine Kolb, Senior Auditor; Michael Steinberg, Senior Auditor; and Dennis Sylvester, Auditor. We performed this audit work at NRC Headquarters in Rockville, Maryland, and Region I offices in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania.

OTHER MATTERS

During the course of this audit, OIG considered other matters, including telework program practices and internal controls used by other Federal agencies such as the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office and the Office of Personnel Management. Key successful telework program practices and internal controls follow.

Successful Telework Program Practices and Internal Controls

- In addition to their Collective Bargaining Agreement, the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office maintains telework policy provisions in a separate policy.
- Communicate with teleworking employees on a regular basis through traditional methods and videoconferencing, document sharing (e.g., use of SharePoint sites), and virtual meetings.
- Plan the work in advance, set expectations, and monitor performance on a continual basis.
- Track the following information: general/salary level, number of days of telework, number of eligible positions teleworking in each office, agencywide teleworkers, percentage of eligible positions teleworking, and percentage of total positions teleworking.
- Consider entering telework information, including telework agreements, into an enterprise-wide telework database by the agency telework coordinator. This should facilitate retrieving the information for the OPM annual data call.
- Consider the applicability and adaptability of reimbursing teleworking employees for costs (subject to limitations) associated with maintaining high-speed internet access at employees' homes. (A January 2007 GAO decision allows agencies to reimburse employees for high-speed Internet service at employees' homes associated with the agency's telework program.)
- Establish controls to help ensure that high-speed Internet access services are reimbursed only for official purposes.