

WORK-LIFE PROGRAMS

1. PURPOSE

This Directive sets forth information about work-life programs available to Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA) employees. These work-life programs are designed to enhance the health and well-being of GIPSA employees while increasing their productivity and morale, and decreasing absenteeism, workers' compensation expenses, turnover rate, deaths, and premature retirements. With the accomplishment of these goals, GIPSA has the opportunity to provide a positive influence on employee health and improve overall productivity, both immediately and in the future.

2. REPLACEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

This Directive replaces GIPSA Directive 4790.7 dated 9/1/04.

3. POLICY

It is GIPSA policy to promote work-life programs that improve employee health, morale, and productivity. Programs should target key lifestyle traits that employees can change to improve their overall health. Programs should provide equal opportunity for all employees regardless of age, sex, or grade level, and should include provisions for employees with disabilities. See Attachment 1 for a listing of Work-Life Resources Web sites and phone numbers.

4. PERSONNEL FLEXIBILITIES

- a.** Nonstandard and Alternative Work Schedules. In many work environments, workers typically come in and leave at the same time every day and work Monday through Friday (i.e., standard schedules). However, wherever possible, GIPSA permits **nonstandard (e.g., 1st-40 hour and 1st- 8 hour tours) and alternative work schedules.** Alternative work schedules include compressed schedules (e.g., 5-4/9) and flexible schedules (e.g., maxiflex). Due to scheduling demands, GIPSA normally is not able to offer alternative work schedules to Federal Grain Inspection Service (FGIS) employees at most field locations.

NOTE: Managers and supervisors are ultimately responsible for establishing tours of duty within the parameters established by this Directive and the Marketing and Regulatory Programs Human Resources Desk Guide (HRDG), Subchapter 4610, Tours of Duty.

Daily tours for Headquarters employees may begin no earlier than 6 a.m. and may end no later than 6 p.m. Field units may establish different start/stop times based on local mission requirements. All Headquarters employees will be assigned to the maxiflex schedule unless mission requirements prevent such a tour.

Additional information about alternative work schedules can be found in the Marketing and Regulatory Programs HRDG, Subchapter 4610.

http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/publications/hr_desk_guide/4610/index.shtml

- b. Telework (Flexiplace). Because many kinds of jobs can be performed outside the traditional office setting, GIPSA has adopted a telework (flexiplace) program. Under this program, some GIPSA employees may perform their duties at home or at local satellite offices for up to 3 days per week.

Telework is a management option rather than an employee benefit. The program is designed to meet the needs of a changing workforce by providing employees with increased workplace flexibilities, as well as addressing many needs, such as, reducing absenteeism, alleviating traffic congestion, enhancing recruitment and retention, balancing work and family life, furthering educational pursuits, and accommodating persons with special medical conditions.

For more information about telework, contact the GIPSA Telework Program Coordinator at (202) 205-8281; MRP Directive 4368.1, Telework Program

http://www.aphis.usda.gov/library/directives/pdf/MRP4368_1.pdf

or the MRP Human Resources Desk Guide, Subchapter 4368, Telework Program Introduction.

http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/publications/hr_desk_guide/4368/index.shtml

- c. Part-Time Employment. GIPSA understands that personal situations and family obligations make it impossible for some employees to work a conventional 40-hour week. So, GIPSA will consider several kinds of part-time scheduling options based on the work requirements of the Agency.

In passing the Federal Employees Part-Time Career Employment Act of 1978 (Public Law 95-437), Congress held that part-time career (permanent) employment benefits the Government by providing an alternative for those who require or prefer shorter hours. Generally, part-time employees work 16 to 32 hours per week (or up to 64 hours per pay period). These workers are eligible for health and life-insurance benefits. However, the premiums for health benefits paid as a part-time employee are higher than those rates for full-time employees, and the life insurance coverage amount is based on actual annual salary rate prorated by the scheduled tour of duty. Please contact your Servicing Benefits Specialist for additional information.

Some GIPSA employees are able to utilize part-time employment to facilitate returning to work following childbirth or to help recover from an accident or

illness. Also, GIPSA believes that making part-time jobs available enhances its ability to ensure that those with disabilities are proportionately represented in its workforce.

- d. Job Sharing. Job sharing is a form of part-time employment in which the tours of duty of two (or more) employees are arranged so they can perform the duties of one full-time position. For instance, GIPSA might hire one clerk to work mornings only and another to complete that job-sharing assignment by working solely in the afternoons. Or, GIPSA might select one program analyst who wants to work Monday and Tuesday only and pair that individual with another analyst who could commit to Wednesday through Friday.

Individuals may be attracted to job sharing because it allows increased flexibility to balance family responsibilities, pursue educational opportunities, phase into retirement, care for elderly parents or ill family members, or reenter the workforce.

Each job sharer may work up to 32 hours per week. Job sharers also may cover each other's absences and thereby reduce their use of sick and annual leave.

Because job sharing is a form of part-time employment, workers are eligible for health and life insurance benefits. However, the premiums for health benefits paid as a part-time employee are higher than those rates for full-time employees, and the life insurance coverage amount is based on the actual annual salary rate prorated by the scheduled tour of duty. Please contact your servicing Benefits Specialist for additional information.

5. FAMILY FRIENDLY LEAVE OPTIONS

GIPSA supervisors are encouraged to make every attempt to help employees strike a balance between the competing needs of work and family. Employees who have exhausted their available sick leave to care for family members may, depending on the circumstances involved, use a combination of accrued annual leave, advanced annual leave, and leave without pay to take time off to handle parental and family responsibilities, such as childbirth, adoption, or the care of sick children. For additional guidance, supervisors and employees should refer to the Marketing and Regulatory Programs HRDG concerning "What are my Family Friendly Leave Options?" http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/hr/pay_leave_tod/feffla.shtml

- a. Absence for Childbirth. The Federal Government provides sick leave to a mother for childbirth based on certification by a medical care provider. A male employee may request authorization to use annual leave to care for the mother of his newborn child while she is incapacitated for maternity reasons. In addition, the Federal Employees Family Friendly Leave Act (FEFFLA) allows employees to use up to 40 hours of sick leave to care for family members who are pregnant or have given birth. Those having a sick leave balance of at least 80 hours of sick

leave may use an additional 64 hours of sick leave (for a total of 104 hours). Either parent may request to use leave without pay (LWOP) as described in the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) section of the MRP HRDG.

http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/publications/hr_desk_guide/4630/4630secf.shtml

- b. Leave for Adoption. Federal employees may use sick leave for purposes of adopting a child. Since procedures and processes vary from State to State and adoption agency to adoption agency, the amount of sick leave granted may vary from person to person.
- c. Absence for (Non-Medical) Children's Needs. All parents have to miss work from time to time because of their children. Parents may request to use accrued annual leave or leave without pay to cover such absences. With your supervisor's concurrence, you may be able to alter your usual work schedule to accommodate such events.
- d. Bereavement and Caring for Family Members. There may be times when employees need time off to attend to the medical needs of family members ^{1/} or following the death of a loved one. All full-time employees may use up to 104 hours of sick leave for bereavement and caring of family members regardless of the amount of accrued sick leave to their credit. Sick leave, however, may not be advanced for the purpose of bereavement and caring for family members. Additionally, with supervisory approval, annual leave and flexible schedules may be used to cover such absences.
- e. Caring for Seriously Ill Family Members. Employees may use up to 480 hours of sick leave per leave year to care for seriously ill family members. ^{1/} Up to 40 hours can be used without regard to your sick leave balance. The remaining 440 hours can be used as long as you maintain a sick leave balance of 80 hours. Sick leave used for other family care purposes during the leave year under FEFFLA must be subtracted from the 480 hour entitlement.
- f. FMLA. In addition to the leave options described above, the FMLA entitles all Federal employees up to 12 weeks of leave without pay to care for a newborn, adopted child, seriously ill or injured family members ^{2/}, or oneself, if ill or injured. Employees can request to substitute paid leave (i.e., sick leave, annual leave, or advanced annual or sick leave) instead of leave without pay, but supervisors may not require them to do so. At the time the FMLA is initially requested, supervisors should remind employees of this option. Employees

1/ For FEFFLA and “caring for seriously ill family members” purposes, “family members” include all in-laws, brothers, sisters, and anyone related by blood or affinity whose close association with the employee is equivalent to a family relationship.

2/ For FMLA purposes, “family members” include spouse, children, and parents (but not in-laws, brothers, sisters, cousins, etc.).

must indicate their preference when the Family and Medical Leave is initially requested. Employees may not substitute paid time off for leave without pay (LWOP) retroactively, and the use of available annual or sick leave does not extend the 12-week period. For additional information, go to the FMLA section of the Marketing and Regulatory Programs HRDG.

http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/publications/hr_desk_guide/4630/4630secf.shtml

- g. Blood Donations. An employee donating blood for which no compensation will be received may (**at the discretion of the employee's supervisor**) be granted up to 4 hours of excused absence for rest and recuperation purposes. The 4 hours is in addition to the time required for the actual donation. It is to be used at the donation site and may only be used on the day of donation. Employees must apply for the excused absence in advance. For additional guidance, see the Marketing and Regulatory Programs Human Resources Desk Guide.
http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/publications/hr_desk_guide/4630/4630sdsc.shtml
- h. Bone Marrow or Organ Donor. An employee will be granted up to 7 days (56 hours) of excused absence in a calendar year to serve as a bone marrow donor and up to 30 days to serve as an organ donor. **NOTE:** For additional information about using excused absence for blood donation, bone marrow or organ donor donations, or related subjects, go to the Excused Absence section of the Marketing and Regulatory Programs Human Resources Desk Guide.
http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/publications/hr_desk_guide/4630/4630sdsc.shtml
- i. Leave-Transfer Program. Serious illnesses can strike an employee without regard to how much leave he/she has been able to accumulate. To ease the burdens these emergencies generate, GIPSA has set up a leave-transfer program. Once the Agency approves an employee's request for leave donations, coworkers can voluntarily transfer annual leave to the qualifying employee. Both donors and recipients benefit from a program that encourages mutual assistance among workers.

The leave transfer program has some restrictions. Only accrued annual leave can be donated, and recipients cannot be declared eligible until they have exhausted all of their own annual and sick leave.

For details about how to apply for the leave-transfer program, contact the GIPSA Leave Transfer Program Coordinator or check out the information in the Marketing and Regulatory Programs HRDG.

http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/hr/pay_leave_tod/leave_donor_listing.shtml

6. **EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (EAP)**

- a. GIPSA has established an EAP to provide confidential counseling and referral services to employees who have personal and/or job-related problems that may adversely affect their performance, attendance, or conduct in the workplace.

Helping employees with such problems can result in increased productivity, reduced personnel costs, and improved employee morale and well-being.

- b. The GIPSA Safety and Health Office has been assigned the administrative responsibility to design, develop, and provide technical guidance and advice to managers and supervisors concerning administrative policy and procedural matters relating to the EAP.
 - (1) GIPSA Regional Office Supervisors and Field Office Managers will:
 - (a) Provide EAP information to all employees, including policy and procedures, for voluntary participation in the EAP, and the locations of available EAP services.
 - (b) Serve as the local contact regarding EAP matters.
 - (2) First-line supervisors will make the EAP known to their employees whenever their job performance is affected and will:
 - (a) Provide available information concerning EAP services to troubled employees **before** recommending disciplinary or adverse action.
 - (b) Recommend and/or grant leave for participation, treatment, and rehabilitation on the same basis that leave is granted for any other situation.
 - (c) Provide confidentiality to employees who participate in services provided through the EAP.
 - (d) Not release information or records without the prior written approval of employees.
 - (e) Inform employees that they or their health insurance provider will assume referral costs (not EAP).
- c. EAP services consist initially of a general evaluation; however, when more professional intervention is necessary, the counselor will refer the employee to professional organizations that provide counseling services. The cost for further professional counseling will be borne by the employee or the employee's health insurance plan.
- d. Counseling is completely confidential and no information will be released without the written consent of the employee. EAP information pertaining to the employee will be maintained by the EAP counselor and maintained in compliance with the Privacy Act (5 United States Code (U.S.C.) 522a), and 42 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 2. No record may be released unless authorized by these

authorities. The employee's job security or promotional opportunities will not be harmed in any way for requesting counseling service or participating in treatment.

- e. Information obtained from an employee will be maintained in one folder and will not be part of the employee's Official Personnel Folder (OPF) or medical records. The OPF will not reflect an employee's participation in EAP activities, treatment, or any rehabilitation programs, except when related to specific work-related charges leading to disciplinary action. Confidentiality of all records concerning EAP must be strictly maintained. No information will be released without the written consent of the employee concerned, except for:
 - (1) Communication between personnel assigned to the EAP and staff members of a qualified service organization to perform needed service to the EAP. Examples are referral facilities and laboratories for medical tests and procedures.
 - (2) Communication of statistical information (without employee identification), annual reports to the GIPSA Safety and Health Office, the Department, management audits, financial audits, or other program evaluations.
 - (3) Transmittal of required information to medical or health personnel to meet medical emergencies.
- f. With supervisory approval, employees may be allowed up to 1 hour (or more as necessitated by travel time) of administrative leave for each counseling session during the assessment/referral phase of rehabilitation (normal range of sessions is 4 to 6 visits per problem). After that, absences during duty hours for rehabilitation or treatment must be charged to the appropriate leave category in accordance with law and leave regulations.
- g. Employees who are recommended for participation by their supervisor will be granted leave (including advanced sick leave) to participate in rehabilitation programs provided by the EAP.

7. TRANSIT PROGRAMS

The 1998 Transportation Equity Act allows employers to provide transit incentives to cover part of their employees' transportation costs. Two incentives are offered: the tax set-aside and the direct subsidy (transit voucher). Executive Order 13150 mandated that by October 1, 2000, agencies provide transit subsidies to employees who commute via mass transit or qualified vanpools. Agencies also may offer a pre-tax parking benefit to those employees who drive, and then park their cars in order to take mass transit and/or a vanpool as part of their daily commute to/from work. These programs are meant to improve air quality and reduce traffic congestion.

a. Transit Subsidy.

- (1) Transit subsidy is a monetary benefit where the Agency provides a specified amount to subsidize employees' monthly commuting costs. Employees are entitled to the Agency's designated maximum benefit amount, or their actual commuting costs, whichever is less.
- (2) An eligible employee must complete an AD-1147, USDA Public Transportation Benefit Program Application. Then, submit the completed form to the GIPSA Transit Subsidy Program Coordinator.
- (3) For more information about the transit subsidy program, go to the Transit Incentive Program section, Subchapter 4060 of the Marketing and Regulatory Programs Human Resources Desk Guide.
http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/publications/hr_desk_guide/4060/index.shtml

b. Pre-Tax Parking.

- (1) The Office of General Counsel has provided guidance that clarifies the authority and eligibility for employees to exclude certain parking expenses from their taxable income (pre-tax parking). This benefit is provided for by Executive Order 13150, CFR 1.132.9, and 5 U.S.C. 7905.
- (2) GIPSA has authorized pre-tax parking for all eligible employees, i.e., employees who park at eligible parking locations and who also meet any of the additional qualifying criteria. An eligible parking location is a metro-parking lot, commercial lot, privately owned parking lot, parking garage, parking meter, or employer provided parking.
- (3) For more information about the pre-tax program, contact the GIPSA Transit Subsidy Program Coordinator or go to:
<http://www.usda.gov/da/shmd/transit.html#PRE-TAX%20PARKING>

- c. Guaranteed Ride Home Program. To encourage ridesharing (vanpools, public transportation, carpools, bicycling, or walking), Commuter Connection offers a free or discounted ride home in case of an unexpected personal or family emergency, personal or family illness, or unscheduled overtime (supervisory verification required). GIPSA Headquarters employees may register for the program by contacting Commuter Connection
<http://www.mwcog.org/commuter2/>

8. **FITNESS CENTERS**

- a. **Program Options.** GIPSA encourages the use of fitness centers to help improve employee health, morale, and productivity. Options for providing fitness facilities include:

- (1) Contracting with an existing facility;
- (2) Establishing a facility, either alone or in cooperation with other agencies;
or
- (3) Joining existing Government facilities through a cooperative agreement.

NOTE: Usually the most expedient and cost effective methods of acquiring fitness facilities are contracting with a private health club or joining an existing Government facility with excess space.

- b. Official Time versus Non-Duty Time. Official time is authorized only to help employees meet job-related medical standards or physical requirements. Otherwise, employees must use non-duty (lunch period, and before and after work) time for such activities. Supervisors, however, should encourage employees to use flextime and/or flexitour to the fullest extent possible. Short periods of excused absences may be authorized for special or one-time educational or awareness programs, such as the Federal Fitness Day, a medical fitness screening procedure for joining a fitness program, or an Agency-sponsored health fair.
- c. Agency-Sponsored Memberships in Privately Owned Health Clubs.
 - (1) Only GIPSA employees may be subsidized by GIPSA for fitness center memberships. These memberships must be group memberships in the Agency's name, and not in the name of individual employees. Employees from other Federal agencies may be allowed to become members under the GIPSA corporate membership agreement if arrangements for sharing funding can be negotiated. If waiting lists exist, memberships cannot be directly transferred from one employee to another. Individual usage must be carefully monitored to ensure the fullest utilization of a membership.
 - (2) GIPSA may use appropriated funds to purchase access to private health club facilities for its employees. All plans for contracting with private health clubs will be forwarded to the Marketing and Regulatory Program Business Services in Minneapolis, through the appropriate Division Director, Field Management Division (FGIS), or Technical Services Division (FGIS), for approval.
 - (3) Funding for fitness center contracts should be a mix of appropriated funds and employee membership fees. A reasonable membership fee should first be established and the balance funded from appropriations.

- (4) Employees will not be reimbursed for clothing, shoes, court time, or equipment purchases associated with a personal fitness and exercise program or program-sponsored activities.
- (5) Employees injured while participating in an Agency-sponsored group membership in privately owned health clubs has the right to file a claim for benefits under the Federal Employees' Compensation Act if the medical evidence shows the employee was injured during participating in the agency-sponsored program.

9. SMOKING CESSATION

- a. Smoking is not allowed on Federal property, including motor vehicles. USDA has established guidelines to allow for designated smoking areas on USDA owned/leased property, found in Department Regulation 4400-006, USDA Smoking Policy, dated July 28, 2009.
<http://www.ocio.usda.gov/directives/doc/DR4400-006.htm>
- b. Employees interested in quitting this addictive pattern are eligible to enroll in smoking cessation classes. GIPSA supervisors are authorized to utilize available funds to pay for smoking cessation programs. Smoking cessation programs are available through the American Heart Association, American Lung Association, American Cancer Society, and the Office of Personnel Management. Also, many hospitals, colleges, and public health services sponsor smoking cessation programs. Carefully review the nature of the program and the sponsor's credentials.
- c. Employees entering a smoking cessation program will not be charged leave, and GIPSA will cover the cost for the first session (approximately four visits). The supervisor may grant administrative leave for a second session/program; however, it is the responsibility of employees to cover the cost of a second session/program. If a third session is needed, employees are totally responsible.

10. INQUIRIES

- a. Direct inquiries regarding this Directive to GIPSA, Management and Budget Service, Safety and Health Staff at 202-720-0251.
- b. This Directive is available on the Internet at
<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/library/gipsa/GIPSA.shtml>

/s/

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Administrator