

ANSWERS TO COMMON TELECOMMUTING/TELEWORK QUESTIONS

What is telecommuting?

Telecommuting is the concept of working from home or another off-site location, one or more days a week. Telecommuting may offer a more productive working environment with fewer distractions which result in better job performance, increased employee morale and job satisfaction, and reduced absenteeism and sick leave usage. Telecommuting may also help retain valued employees and recruit new people while improving the quality of life in our campus community.

Is telecommuting an employee benefit?

Offering the opportunity to work at home is a management option; telecommuting is not an employee benefit or right. Supervisors may select employees who have the abilities and circumstances at home necessary to telecommute. An employee's participation in the program is entirely voluntary.

How do I know that telecommuters are really working?

The conditions of employment and the work performance standards for telecommuters remain the same as for non-telecommuting employees. The employee meets with the supervisor to receive assignments, and completes the assigned work according to the work procedures and expectations established by the supervisor. The employee's completed work product is the indicator of the work performed by the telecommuter.

Will employees work less if they are working at an alternate work site unsupervised?

Not necessarily. Survey results show marked improvements in productivity. Productivity typically increases because employees have fewer distractions and interruptions, work at their peak times, and experience less stress due to the absence of the commute to work.

What if telecommuting doesn't work out?

Both the telecommuter and the supervisor should understand that if telecommuting does not work out for an individual, it may not in any way reflect on that individual's ability to perform his or her job. The employee or the supervisor may terminate telecommuting without cause.

What are the issues that telecommuters should be aware of?

Coping with Interruptions:

Often, friends, neighbors and family members do not realize that a telecommuter is working. A telecommuter must learn to keep interruptions to a minimum.

Designating Space:

A designated work area is recommended for telecommuting. A separate workspace may result in fewer distractions or interruptions and a higher level of discipline and organization.

Gaining Support:

A family or supervisor's attitude may sometimes be detrimental to a telecommuting arrangement. A telecommuter must gain the support and understanding of those around them.

What happens if the employee is injured while working?

Since the employee's alternate work area is an extension of the office, if the employee is hurt while working, he or she is covered for worker's compensation. The employee must notify his or her supervisor immediately and complete the necessary documents regarding injury. Because an injury is outside the traditional work place, the supervisor must be sure to investigate all reports immediately upon notification.

How do I ensure that the alternate work location is safe, and how is a claim for injury handled?

It is the employee's responsibility to ensure that their home workspace complies with health and safety requirements. Home office must be clean and free of obstructions. The home must be in compliance with all building codes and free of hazardous materials. Management may deny or cancel the telecommuting agreement based on safety problems in the home. The employer may make on-site visits to the alternate work location for the purpose of determining that the site is safe and free from hazards, and to maintain, repair, inspect or retrieve employer-owned equipment, software, data or supplies

Is telecommuting a substitute for child or elder care?

No. A telecommuter must focus on his or her job, not handle demanding child- or eldercare situations. However, telecommuters are better able to manage their work/family schedules because they have greater flexibility in their work hours.

Can telecommuting result in reduced use of sick leave?

Yes. An employee working in the regular office usually has to use a half-day of sick time to get to a doctor or dental appointment. A telecommuter can take an hour or two for the appointment and then return to work, thereby taking perhaps two hours instead of four hours. Also, often an employee that does not feel well enough to drive to the office or whose child is sick may work some hours at home.