Q1. What is “telework”?

A1. Telework is a flexible work arrangement that benefits both employee’s and management under which an employee performs the duties and responsibilities of his/her position and other authorized activities from an approved alternate worksite other than the employee’s designated traditional Federal workplace.

Q2. What is a “telework-ready” employee?

A2. An employee who has:
   • Completed the required telework training for employees via the Commerce Learning Center (CLC);
   • a signed individual telework agreement
   • the required technological necessities to telework (ie. Computer, internet access, electricity, telephone, etc.)
   • a safe and appropriate approved alternate work site
   • sufficient work that can be completed at the alternate work site

Q3. Who is eligible to telework?

A3. The Department of Commerce (DOC) considers all employees eligible unless:

   • the employee has been officially disciplined for being absent without permission for more than five (5) days in any calendar year;
   • the employee has been officially disciplined for violations of the, Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch, for viewing, downloading, or exchanging pornography, including child pornography, on a Federal Government computer or while performing official Federal Government duties; or
   • the employee’s performance does not comply with the terms of the written agreement between the approving official and the employee. This written
agreement refers to both the employee’s performance plan and any other written arrangement between the employee and supervisor/approving official regarding the employee’s performance expectations.

Q4. What is a remote worker and can an employee telework outside of the United States?

A4. A remote worker is an employee teleworking full-time from an alternate work site. The alternate work site becomes the employee’s official duty station for pay purposes. Remote teleworking outside the United States requires approval from OAR’s Assistant Administrator or designated Deputy Assistant Administrator and additional approvals from NOAA and DOC. The employee must complete the “NOAA Remote and Overseas Telework Assessment Questionnaire” and obtain the necessary approvals at least 180 days prior to the requested effective date of teleworking overseas. The questionnaire must be approved prior to submitting the “NOAA DETO Core Telework Agreement” to the Department of State for approval.

Q5. Is there a requirement to renew telework agreements annually?

A5. NOAA no longer requires an annual renewal process for telework agreements. Once an agreement is signed and approved by the approving official, the approving official will select a termination date; agreements may remain effective indefinitely unless there is a modification or a request to terminate the agreement; indefinite agreements must indicate that they are indefinite. Approving officials may establish a renewal process within their Programs/Labs/Offices. It is recommended that approving officials review telework agreements periodically for accuracy and work needs within the office.

Q6. What are the different telework options?

A6. There are two types of telework options:

- Routine/Regular/Recurring Telework
- Situational Telework
Unscheduled Telework occurs under an announcement by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) or other appropriate authority.
Ad Hoc Telework performed on an ad hoc occasional, one-time, or irregular basis.

Q7. Can employees select Regular and Situational options on their telework agreement?

A7. Employees may select Regular and Situational options on their telework agreement as long as the approving official agrees with the selection.

Q8. Does an employee have to take the telework training annually?

A8. No, there is no requirement in the Department of Commerce’s Telework policy that states an employee must take the telework training annually. However, once taken, a copy of the completion certificate should be maintained and a copy should be provided to the approving official. Approving officials may require employees to take the training annually within their Programs/Labs/Offices.

Q9. Who can approve telework agreements?

A9. The director (or her/his designee(s)) of the employee’s office. For example, the director could designate the employee’s supervisor as the approving official.

Q10. During inclement weather or emergencies, there may be school closings. If a child is at home due to a school closing, can an employee telework?

A10. Telework may not be used as a substitute for dependent care. If alternative caregivers are available and the employee is capable of accomplishing work without distraction, telework may be performed while dependents are in the telework location. If elders, children, or other dependents are able to care for themselves, and their self-care is not prohibited by local or state law(s), then their presence at the telework location would not interfere with the employee performing telework.
In the event of an office closure that results from a weather or safety emergency that also impacts the availability of dependent care (i.e. schools and/or care facilities are closed or inaccessible), supervisors may determine that, under certain conditions, employees are capable of teleworking even if they have children or elderly parents in the home. However, if these circumstances diminish an employee’s ability to work, he/she will not be eligible to telework under these conditions.

If a supervisor bars telework at home in the given child/elder care situation, then the home is not an approved telework location during the weather or safety emergency. Thus, if the employee is not permitted to telework under these circumstances, and cannot safely travel to or perform work at the regular office location, the supervisor must grant weather/safety leave to the employee.

Q11. Can employees that teleworks benefit from the early release DOC offers to employees before holidays (e.g. Labor Day)?

A11. Usually employees that telework will be granted the same administrative leave benefit as those physically in the office. Please review the communication notice that is forwarded to all employees during these instances.

Q12. Does an employee have to follow the telework agreement requirements when approval to use telework as a reasonable accommodation is granted?

A12. The reasonable accommodation may possibly be outside of the scope of the telework agreement. It is important to distinguish between ordinary requests to telework and requests from persons with disabilities for reasonable accommodation. Approving officials/supervisors should review Department Administrative Order (DAO) 215-10, "Reasonable Accommodation Policy," and consult with the Reasonable Accommodations Coordinators part of the interactive process established by the Rehabilitation Act, in order to fully understand supervisors' responsibilities under the law.
Reasonable accommodation is any modification or adjustment to a job or the work environment that will enable an employee with a disability to perform essential job functions.

REFERENCES:

NOAA’s Telework Program:
http://www.wfm.noaa.gov/POAD/telework/telework.html

QUESTIONS:
Contact Tim Ash on 301-734-1286 or at timothy.k.ash@noaa.gov with questions regarding these frequently asked questions.