

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
RURAL DEVELOPMENT  
HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA

TO:

State Office  
Area Office

STATE PROCEDURE  
NOTICE

ISSUE NO. 306

DATE: 3/20/2008

RURAL DEVELOPMENT MANUAL CHANGES

Procedure for Requesting/Granting Leave: THERE ARE NO CHANGES

PA PN 288 was issued on 12/9/2004 to provide clarification for policies and procedures for requesting leave using revised Form OPM-71 and to insert references to NFC STAR Web Time and Attendance Instructions. (Page 1)

Hazardous Weather Leave: This PA PN updates previous PA PN 288, issued on 12/9/2004, which referenced “Administrative Contacts” and references to the Flexiplace Program Plan.

RD Pennsylvania no longer has “Administrative Contacts” in each office. We are replacing the terminology with “Team Leaders”. This instruction was issued to clarify PA’s policies and procedures for granting leave for hazardous weather conditions.

RD Instruction 2045-A (Flexiplace/Telework) is referenced in place of Flexiplace Program Plan, page 4.

REMOVE: PA Instruction 2066-A, paragraph 2066.12 (r), page 60, pages 2, 3 and 4.

INSERT: PA Instruction 2066-A, paragraph 2066.12 (r), page 60, insert attached updated pages 2, 3, and 4.

2066.1 (f)

(f) Procedure for requesting/granting leave. The accurate completion of the OPM Form 71 dated June 2001, (form can be found at [www.opm.gov](http://www.opm.gov)) is a shared responsibility among the employee, timekeeper, and supervisor. A detailed list of the roles and responsibilities of the employee, timekeeper, and supervisor during the leave request process can be found in the current Time and Attendance STAR Web Instructions, available at the NFC website: ([www.nfc.usda.gov](http://www.nfc.usda.gov))

An OPM Form 71 is required as documentation for all leave taken with the exception of Administrative Leave for Federal holidays. This would include, but is not limited to, Annual Leave, Sick Leave, Credit Leave, Compensatory Leave, Leave Without Pay, Advanced Leave, Time-Off Award Leave, mandatory grants of Annual Leave to disabled veterans, if necessary for medical treatment, after sick leave is exhausted, and the advance scheduling of leave in excess of 3 days.

As standard operating procedure, the OPM Form 71 will be completed and approved BEFORE the leave is actually taken. Some circumstances (illness, unexpected situations, etc.) will not allow for the OPM Form 71 to be completed in advance. In this case, the form should be promptly completed upon return to the office. These situations, however, should be the exception, not the rule.

(1) The employee should initiate the leave request procedure by completing sections 1 through 7b of the OPM Form 71. After completion, the form should be submitted to the employee's leave approving supervisor for signature and date. The supervisor will review the request and either approve or deny it. If denied, the supervisor should complete sections 8a through 8d and document a reason for disapproval. The OPM Form 71 will then be returned to the requesting employee. If approved, the supervisor will complete sections 8a through 8d. The supervisor will then inform the employee of the approval and forward the OPM Form 71 to the employee's timekeeper. The completed OPM Form 71 is attached to the employee's Time and Attendance (T&A) record for the corresponding pay period. The retention period for T&A records is 6 years.

(2) The process outlined above should typically be completed BEFORE the leave is actually used. If the leave request changes (after being completed), the OPM Form 71 must be updated to properly reflect the change. This can be done by completing a new (replacement) OPM Form 71 or by making "pen and ink" (including initials of employee and supervisor and new date) changes to the already approved form. The critical element is that the signed/approved OPM Form 71 on file properly documents the type, amount, and timeframe of leave used. This will allow for accurate paper trails and history. After action by the leave-approving officer, send the OPM Form 71 to the employee's timekeeper for retention in the time and attendance file.

2066.12 (r)

**OFFICE CLOSURES**

- The State Director will be the Responsible Official for the State Office. *(Prior to the State Office opening, if the Governor should announce conditions in the Harrisburg area are hazardous enough to warrant All State Employee's under his/her jurisdiction staying home, then State Office Rural Development employees should stay home as well.)*
- Team Leaders/Supervisors may determine to close any office, excusing all employees from work, if one of the following occurs:
  1. Declaration by the CAC that an emergency exists for which Rural Development employees should be excused from duty.
  2. Official public announcement by State, local, or Federal authorities that driving and travel should be avoided because of an emergency condition; or,
  3. Approval of the State Director.
  4. In determining whether to close an office before or after the beginning of business, Team Leaders/Supervisors must consult with their counterparts in other collocated agencies of USDA and, to the maximum extent possible, coordinate their plans to promote equitable treatment of all USDA employees.
  5. Supervisors who determine that weather conditions are too extreme for employees to travel safely should also stay home.

**EMERGENCY BEFORE THE WORKDAY BEGINS**

All employees are responsible for obtaining the appropriate information as announced by media. In cases of emergency dismissal or closure before working hours, the State Director or the local County Administrative Committee (CAC) will make every effort to notify the media or notify each individual of their decision before 6:00 a.m. and will provide one of the following announcements:

1. Rural Development office is open on time and employees are expected to report as scheduled. Employees are reminded that Rural Development frequently does not make an announcement when no changes are required. When there is no announcement by the media or contact made to employees, employees are expected to report to work as usual. Any leave taken due to tardiness is subject to supervisory approval.

2. ***Rural Development agencies are operating under an unscheduled leave policy; employees may take leave without prior approval.*** This means that Rural Development agencies will open on time, but employees not designated as "emergency employees" may take annual leave or LWOP without prior approval from their Supervisors. Accrued compensatory time may also be used instead of leave if requested by the employee. Employees should inform their Supervisors of their intentions.
3. ***Rural Development is operating under an Adjusted Home Departure policy. Employees are requested to leave home (to be announced by the media or direct contact made to the employee) hours later than their normal departure time.*** This means that employees should adjust their normal home departure time consistent with the announcement. Reasonable delays in reporting for work at their duty station/ADS will be excused up to the time designated without loss of pay or charge to leave for employees who experience serious commuting delays.
4. ***Rural Development is closed.*** This means employees are excused from duty without loss of pay or charge to leave.

**An employee on an alternative work schedule (AWS) whose AWS day off is the same workday on which an USDA office is closed is not entitled to another "in lieu of" day off.**

#### **EMERGENCIES DURING NORMAL WORK HOURS**

When an emergency situation occurs during normal work hours, the State Director or CAC will announce that Rural Development is operating under an "adjusted work dismissal" policy. Team Leaders/Supervisors will inform employees when a decision is made to release Rural Development employees early. Additionally, whether an employee is charged leave during early dismissal periods depends on whether the employee was in a duty or leave status at the time of the dismissal. For example:

1. Team Leaders/Supervisors should not charge leave, but grant excused absence, for any employee on duty at the time an "adjusted work dismissal" policy is officially announced. An excused absence is appropriate for the remainder of the workday following the employee's authorized time of dismissal, even if the employee is scheduled to take leave later in the day.
2. When an employee leaves after receiving official word of the pending dismissal, but before the time set for his or her authorized dismissal (with supervisory approval), the employee will be charged leave for the period remaining before the dismissal time.

3. When an employee is scheduled to return from leave after the announcement of an "adjusted work dismissal" policy, but before his or her authorized time of dismissal, the supervisor will charge leave for the period during which the employee is on approved leave and grant excused absence for the remainder of the workday following the employee's time of dismissal.
4. When an employee is absent on previously approved annual leave, sick leave, or LWOP for the entire workday, the employee will be charged leave for the entire workday.
5. When an employee leaves before official word of the "adjusted work dismissal" is received, the supervisor should charge leave or AWOL (absence without leave), as appropriate, for the remainder of the workday.
6. When an employee is scheduled to report for work before any early dismissal, but is unable to do so, he/she must contact the supervisor to obtain leave approval.

#### **ALTERNATE DUTY STATIONS**

- Employees scheduled to report to a duty station other than their regular duty station should attempt to report to their regular duty station if the alternative site is closed due to adverse weather conditions.
- Employees not scheduled to report to a duty station other than their regular duty station, but who can travel more safely to an alternative duty station than to their regular duty station, may report to the alternative duty station if:
  1. Their supervisor and the supervisor of the alternative duty station concur in advance; and
  2. There is work to perform at the alternative site that is equivalent to the work that the employees would perform at their regular duty station, or the employees have brought work home with them from their regular duty station the preceding day to take to the alternative duty station in anticipation of adverse weather conditions.
  3. If your alternate duty station is your home, generally you are not eligible for hazardous weather leave, because the ability to perform work at home was the primary factor in granting the alternate work site arrangement.

4. A telecommuting employee may sometimes be affected by an emergency and may be excused from work. For example, on a "hazardous weather leave day" the agency may excuse a telecommuting employee if he or she cannot perform work because the regular office is closed and/or the alternative worksite is affected by the emergency (e.g., a power outage). The agency should grant the telecommuting employee excused absence as appropriate. When an emergency affects only the alternative worksite for a major portion of the workday, the agency can require the telecommuting employee to report to the regular office, approve annual leave or LWOP, or authorize an excused absence. Employees who have a flexiplace agreement in place should refer to the RD Instruction 2045-A, 2045.4 (e), pgs. 3 and 4.

#### **STATE OFFICE NOTIFICATIONS**

- Any Team Leader/Supervisor closing an office before or after beginning of business, must verbally notify the State Office (Human Resources) and follow-up in writing, certifying that this was a CAC decision, who was affected and the number of hours charged to Administrative Leave. ***The memo should identify who, what, when and why.*** (You should E-mail request to Human Resources for processing. Upon the State Director's concurrence, an approved copy will be forwarded to the timekeepers.)
- In the event the State Office closes, the State Director will notify Area Offices, the Under Secretary's Office and the Director, Emergency Preparedness Office.