

Testimony
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Status of Telework at the Department of the Interior
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The Department of the Interior supports teleworking as part of our overall commitment to improving the quality of worklife for our employees. We have actively promoted telework for our employees for several years. Since 1994, the Department has encouraged managers to use telework as one of the flexible work arrangements that create a family-friendly workplace.

We have encouraged our bureaus to use the extensive guidance material issued by the Office of Personnel Management and the General Services Administration. Consequently, the majority of our bureaus and offices have telework policies. The Department is in the process of finalizing a formal agency telework policy, consistent with provisions of Section 359 of P.L. 106-346. We plan to have the policy in place by October 1, 2004.

Telework is one of the tools that we use to help us attract and retain a highly talented and diverse workforce. It is one of a suite of flexible personnel policies that create a desirable workplace that appeals to a wide range of employees. It is one element that will be recommended in our strategic diversity plan that is nearing completion.

We also encourage the use of telework when employees may face difficulties in commuting. Because of our proximity to the World Bank, we have encouraged employees with approved telework agreements to telework during meetings of the International Monetary Fund when significant traffic congestion was expected. Similarly, we encourage the use of approved telework for other events in the downtown area of Washington, DC that are expected to cause significant traffic congestion. Recently, these included the National Football League Kickoff on the National Mall last fall, and the day before the dedication of the World War II Memorial in May.

Our employees with approved telework agreements are also encouraged to use telework during times of heightened security threat levels. This helps us to prepare to execute contingency procedures that may require moving to alternate work sites or dispersing the workforce. With increasing commute times and distances that are exacerbated during times of winter weather, we encourage employees to telework during times of adverse weather conditions.

We face many of the same barriers to teleworking as other agencies. One of greatest barriers is the willingness of managers to allow employees to participate. Similar to other agencies, many of our managers fear that they will not be able to meet organizational demands if employees are teleworking. In addition, the Department of the Interior employs over 70,000 employees at over 2,400 worksites. Many of these worksites are in remote locations and are in very small offices of ten employees or less. Many employees in our national parks and wildlife refuges are in jobs

that require them to be at a park or refuge providing service directly to the public. Also, Interior has the third largest number of law enforcement personnel in the government who have significant responsibilities for protecting many of the nation's important monuments and dams. Since 9/11 and particularly during periods of heightened security, their responsibilities have not been conducive to teleworking.

We appreciate OPM's efforts to address managers' concerns. Particularly, we find events such as OPM's full day discussion and brainstorming session regarding best practices and success stories from a manager's perspective to be helpful. One of our managers from the Minerals Management Service took part in an OPM video promoting telework that was then shown throughout the bureau. Another manager served as a panel member on an OPM/GSA-sponsored Webinar in June 2004, sharing best practices, solutions to issues, and responding to frequently asked questions.

As we find managers who are successful, we are trying to match them up with managers in similar situations to share success stories and help identify ways to overcome barriers. Because of the diversity of the missions and locations of our bureaus and offices, we are finding that "one size fits all" solutions don't always work across the board. We plan to hold focus groups to bring our successful managers together to share their best practices and identify the obstacles they have overcome. This will help us in promoting telework to other managers.

While we face many challenges, we are committed to expanding the use of telework across the Department. We will work with our managers to increase their understanding and use of this and other workplace flexibilities that will help us to recruit and retain a highly skilled and diverse workforce.

I would be happy to answer any questions that the Committee may have.