

TELECOMMUTING SUMMARY REPORT

Background:

On July 1, 1998, the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) initiated a Telecommuting Pilot Project within its Albany Central Office. The pilot was originally scheduled to operate through March 31, 1999. Participating programs included the Divisions of Air Resources (14 telecommuters), Operations (4 telecommuters) and Legal Affairs (3 telecommuters).

Operating guidelines (copy attached) were established and selection of the participants for the pilot program was done after interested employees completed a questionnaire developed by the Telecommuting Committee. Supervisors were required to recommend whether or not the interested employee should be considered. Final selection of employees for the pilot was approved by each Division Director.

Telecommuting was limited to a maximum of four (4) days in any two-week pay period. The pilot program was monitored by the DEC's Office of Employee Relations.

During March 1999, the Governor's Office of Employee Relations (GOER) notified agencies, including the DEC, that telecommuting programs could be continued pursuant to the existing GOER/PEF Telecommuting Memorandum of Agreement until such time as a successor Agreement is negotiated. However, agencies were asked to "freeze" their telecommuting programs, including pilot programs, at current participation levels. Programs that were currently designated as pilots would continue with that designation until a new Agreement was negotiated.

During June 1999, survey questionnaires were developed and distributed to the nineteen (19) remaining telecommuters, as well as to their supervisors (10), and co-workers (34) within each (telecommuting) unit.

Summaries of the responses to the questionnaires are attached.

Response Summary:

Telecommuter:

In general telecommuters reported that their telecommuting experience was positive. They reported they were able to accomplish more work at home due to fewer distractions and thus were more productive. About eight percent (80%) of the telecommuters reported they worked the same hours at home as they did in the office. Half of the respondents used their personal internet account to perform State work. Only fifteen percent (15%) of telecommuters indicated that additional training would benefit them as telecommuters. ***All telecommuters indicated they would continue to telecommute should the program be continued on a long-term basis.***

Seventy-five percent (75%) of telecommuters indicated they experienced

difficulties in making and using connections to the agency computer systems due to the "PC Anywhere" and/or "GroupWise Remote," interface software programs. About one half of the telecommuters also expressed an interest in having such things as an extra phone line, fax machine, zip drive, etc.

Supervisor:

Supervisors were overwhelmingly in favor of telecommuting. Sixty percent (60%) of supervisors indicated they felt telecommuting made their employees more productive due to fewer interruptions experienced while working at home. All supervisors reported that telecommuters completed all scheduled telecommuting related activities/duties throughout the duration of the pilot. Half of the supervisors indicated telecommuting had some impact on their supervisory workload; specifically, a slight increase in report/record keeping activities. Twenty percent (20%) of supervisors indicated they would benefit from additional telecommuting related training. ***Nine of ten supervisors surveyed indicated they would permit their staff to continue telecommuting should the program be continued.***

Co-Worker:

Ninety percent (90%) of co-workers indicated that telecommuters had little or no impact upon their work. Twenty percent (20%) of co-workers indicated that occasionally there was some difficulty with communication and/or scheduling involving the telecommuters. Also, sixty percent (60%) of the co-workers surveyed stated that neither they nor the office operations derived any benefit(s) from their co-worker(s) telecommuting experience because telecommuting was perceived as being more of a benefit to the telecommuter(s). However, they did not perceive telecommuting as having any overall negative impact upon themselves or the office operations.

Environmental benefits such as less emissions and reduced fuel consumption were noted by some co-workers.

Committee Recommendation:

Based upon survey responses, the Telecommuting Committee believes the program was successful and provided a valuable benefit to participating DEC employees. Further, a successful telecommuting program will ensure the DEC does its part in contributing to reduced levels of both air pollution and highway congestion. Also, considering concerns over such issues as sufficient parking related to the Department's pending move to downtown Albany, programs such as telecommuting can prove beneficial to DEC. ***Accordingly, the committee recommends the telecommuting program be continued as a pilot, pursuant to GOER's March 1999 decision.*** ***Additionally, should a successor telecommuting Agreement be negotiated, the Committee recommends the telecommuting program be expanded to include other***

programs within the DEC Central Office and Regions. However, the number of participants in each program should be limited to a manageable number, to be determined by each Division/Regional Director.

The Telecommuting Committee remains available to meet with appropriate Department personnel to discuss and/or resolve those issues/problems identified in the survey, i.e., equipment/services to be provided to telecommuters. The Committee will continue to review the guidelines and rules for telecommuting, proposing changes, as appropriate. Additionally, rules to ensure accountability within the program should be established, as should procedures for the monitoring and enforcement of such rules.