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NIH Employee Emergency Designation Program

In 2011 and 2012 the NIH has experienced emergencies of all types, such as "snowmageddon," earthquakes, hurricanes, and power outages. These are just a few emergency situations that have prompted the NIH to take a broader approach in preparing for all types of emergency situations to ensure the safety of our employees, patients, visitors, and animals.

I appointed a group of members from the intramural, extramural, and emergency planning communities, as well as representatives from the ICs to develop guidelines and methods to more clearly communicate across NIH in the event of an emergency announced by DHHS, OPM, or NIH. This committee developed a plan that will help NIH clearly communicate to its employees, and help its employees know how they should respond to a given emergency. At this time, this plan has focused on employees but we are working toward expanding it to our contractor community as well.

Our goal is to support the Administration's objective by maintaining the ability of the NIH to execute its mission during any event that may temporarily impact or close some or all NIH facilities. We are now implementing the recommendations of this committee, including an "Employee Emergency Designation Program" that uses a tiered system based on the activities or functions performed by the employee to support the NIH mission.

EMPLOYEE DESIGNATION PROCESS

Since July, 2012, your ICs have been designating each employee into one of the three major tiers identified below. All of the designations were made in coordination with IC management.

* TIER I: Emergency Employees: Perform functions involving patient care, patient care support, care and feeding of animals, and maintenance and protection of the NIH physical plant. TIER I Emergency Employees must report to work onsite, unless otherwise directed by supervisor, at the regularly scheduled start of their duty hours during delayed openings, dismissals, closures, and other announcements regarding the use of unscheduled telework or unscheduled leave as announced by the OPM, DHHS, NIH, and senior leadership in the Office of Human Resources, the Office of the Director, or their IC.

* TIER II: Mission Critical/Mission Operations Support Employees: Perform functions whose omission would negatively impact the ability of the agency to perform its Mission Essential and IC Critical Program and Business functions. Tier II Mission Critical/Mission Operations Support Employees typically perform functions which can be conducted at an alternative work site and have telework agreements in place that permit teleworking during emergencies.

Tiers I and II have sub-tiers that provide the supervisor with a depth of resources to access during an emergency.

* TIER III: Other Mission Services & Support Employees: Includes the following employees:

- Employees whose functions must be performed onsite at their duty station but not at the onset of an emergency.
- Employees whose functions must be performed onsite but not when the emergency impacts their duty station (relevant for an at-home duty station).
- Employees who choose not to participate in the telework program or are not eligible to telework.

- Tier III employees are expected to follow the guidance described in the table below for office closures and unscheduled leave announcements.

A copy of the guidelines including detailed descriptions of each of the tiers can be found at: <http://www.ors.od.nih.gov/ser/depc/info/Pages/default.aspx>.

EMPLOYEE NOTIFICATION PROCESS: The designation phase of this program is nearly complete. Employees have either been notified of their tier designation or are in the process of being notified by their IC of their specific tier designation and the expectations of their tier during emergency situations. If you have not already received your tier notification, you can expect to soon receive it.

EMPLOYEE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT PROCESS: By December 31, 2012 employees are expected to acknowledge their tier designation.

If you have any questions regarding your tier designation, please contact your supervisor.

These are general designations and expected to apply to most situations, however, in the event that something unexpected occurs, the IC Director or his/her designee, may change an employee's tier status. Similarly, as in the past, supervisors are expected to consider an employee's personal situation for a particular emergency (e.g., they are snowed in or have no electricity).

FUTURE NIH EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS: After December 31, 2012, the Tier designations will be used in all future NIH emergency communications to guide employees using the structure below.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR STATUS DURING OFFICE CLOSURES AND WHEN OFFICES ARE OPEN UNDER UNSCHEDULED LEAVE AND UNSCHEDULED TELEWORK ANNOUNCEMENTS.

Emergency Employee - Tier I

Employees to report for duty on time and remain for the duration of tour of duty unless otherwise directed by supervisor.

Non-Emergency Employee/Teleworker - Tier IIA, Tier IIB, Tier IIC Employees required to telework if the emergency occurs on a regular telework day or if the telework agreement stipulates the requirement to "Ad Hoc Telework" during emergency situations declared by the Office the Office of Personnel Management, DHHS, NIH, or the IC.

Non-Emergency Employee/Non-Teleworker - Tier III When offices are CLOSED and Tier III employees are prevented from working due to an emergency, then absence should be granted. However, excused absence should not be granted to employees on (1) leave (2) official travel, or (3) a flexible or compressed work schedule day off.

When offices are OPEN under unscheduled leave or unscheduled telework announcements, then Tier III employees are required to request leave or report to the office.

Note: Under exceptional emergency circumstances, Tiers II and III can be asked by their IC Director or his or her designee to come to work to perform a Tier I function.

When you receive your designation, please review the description and guidance that accompanies it.

Thank you for ensuring that NIH can maintain its mission during any type of emergency situation.

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