

A message for Jim Smerchansky, NAVSEA Executive Director



NAVSEA Family,

This is a long e-mail, but I ask that you read it all as there is important information on how we are working to address your concerns during this period of uncertainty:

“Calm urgency.” That’s a term used by our Chief of Staff, Captain Derrick Blackston, at a meeting this week and it perfectly sums up what is required at this time of rapid change. Panic and unfocused effort will conspire against us, so I want to continue to stress that we remain focused on preparations tied to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Bottom line up front: Preparedness starts with you. Please continue to practice proper hygiene habits. Wash your hands with soap for 20 seconds, regularly clean high-touch areas, contain coughs and sneezes, provide proper social distance as much as possible, minimize large-group gatherings, and avoid coming into contact with people who might be sick.

It’s also critical that you follow proper procedures if you believe you may have come in contact with someone who is sick, or if you exhibit symptoms of COVID-19. Symptoms include a fever, a cough, and/or a sore throat. If this applies to you, **DO NOT COME INTO WORK**. The best thing to do is to remain in your house, contact your medical professional and follow their established health procedures. You should also notify your supervisors. They will be able to provide work-related guidance, depending on your job and ability to work remotely. I’ve attached a flow chart of actions you should take if you believe you’ve been exposed or may have contracted COVID-19.

TELEWORK

We have received a number of questions about telework from across the NAVSEA Enterprise. Therefore, I am issuing the below prospective guidance to maximize productivity should we have to rely on mass telework.

Please understand that we are in an unprecedented situation that is rapidly evolving. We may receive guidance or clarification that could supersede what is written below. If that is the case we will share new guidance as soon as it is available.

The below does not apply to employees designated as emergency employees.

Telework during a Closure and/or Evacuation

- Telework Ready Employees

- * Be Prepared to Telework during a Closure

§ Employees with any type of telework agreement must continue to bring their laptops home every day. Employees must also ensure that they have sufficient work to complete while teleworking.

§ Employees should take all reasonable steps to ensure that they have access to materials necessary to complete work, such as by saving documents and emails on laptop folders that can be accessed off-line.

§ Supervisors are instructed to review their employees' workloads to ensure they have sufficient work to perform. Supervisors and employees should consider developing projects that would add value to the mission but that can be completed without network connectivity such as creating Operating Procedures and manuals, completing training requirements, further developing their substantive skills by conducting general research.

§ All supervisors should establish a method by which they can reach employees and colleagues if connectivity issues impact regular channels of communication.

- All Employees - Evacuation

- o In the event an evacuation from your workplace is ordered, we may order employees to work from home without regard to whether there is a telework agreement in place. Your supervisor and Chain of Command may assign any work

considered necessary without regard to your grade and title but only if you have the necessary knowledge and skills to perform the work.

- o Therefore, all employees must follow the guidance above regarding laptops and work assignments to ensure that they are ready to perform work from an alternate site. ALL employees should take telework training as soon as you can to be prepared to telework regardless of whether you have a telework agreement in place. You should also begin immediately bringing your laptop home with you every night.

During a Closure and/or Evacuation

- Work Assignments

- o If a teleworking employee does not have enough work to cover the telework day, you must contact your supervisor and request additional assignments. If there is no other work that you can complete, then you should work on completing any training that may be outstanding. You may even work on self-improvement. Anything that improves your professional skills will be considered valid work. Expect more from me on this with additional suggestions in the next few days. As a last resort, your supervisor may put you on administrative leave status for the time that you did not have work to do.

- o Employees who fail to bring their laptops and work materials home or otherwise fail to reasonably prepare for this emergency will not be authorized to receive weather and safety leave. Exceptions will only be granted by your command/directorate's senior leader and only if there is good cause.

- Scheduling maximum Flexibilities during Closure and/or Evacuation

- o I am waiving the usual requirement that teleworking employees adhere to core hours and regular schedules. If the circumstances of a closure makes this difficult or impossible, employees are allowed to perform their work duties outside of the core hours without taking leave and may flex their time across the work-week.

- * Employees must keep their supervisors informed of the circumstances and notify them of the schedule changes, including the alternate times they will work to fulfill their time requirement.

- * Employees who are not already on a maxi-flex schedule will be permitted flexibility to alter their daily schedules as necessary.

- * Employees must keep track of the times, dates, and work that they perform.

- Telework Complications during Closure and/or Evacuation

- o Technology Issues

§ There may be technological issues that affect telework, such as network connectivity. Employees should make reasonable efforts to overcome these obstacles, including connecting at off-peak hours. Employees must inform their supervisor of these issues. In this situation, and if there is no other work that the employee can complete, then the employee may be carried in an administrative leave status for that time.

- o Dependent Care at the Alternate Workplace during Closure and/or Evacuation

§ Some employees will likely have dependents at home due to COVID-19 closures and routine child or dependent care may interfere with the employees' ability to perform work. In these instances, employees may be given maximum schedule flexibility during the work week in order to meet their work obligations.

§ Ordinarily, weather and safety leave may not be used to cover the time a telework ready employee spends providing dependent care; in normal circumstances, employees would need to use appropriate leave to cover this period. This is one of the main reasons I have waived the core hours requirement. Intent is to give you every opportunity to get your time in while juggling other commitments.

- We are awaiting further DoD guidance on any further flexibilities that can be provided to employees in this situation, including the availability of administrative leave.

- Supervisors should be flexible with granting requests for advanced annual and/or advanced sick leave, as appropriate.

§ An employee caring for an ill family member should explore sick leave options.

- * To the maximum extent practical, supervisors should approve requests to telework part-time or full- from employees in CDC-identified special populations more vulnerable to COVID-19, which includes pregnant women, older employees, and employees with chronic health conditions including high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, lung disease or compromised immune systems, without requiring medical documentation prior to granting telework. [<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html>] [<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/pregnant-women-and-children.html>] In those rare cases where an employee in a high-risk category is not telework eligible, they may be authorized weather and safety leave.

To help employees who do not telework regularly, we put together the attached toolkit that has step-by-step instructions on how to connect to NMCI remotely; other ways to connect; how to forward calls from your office phone; how to retrieve voicemails from your work phone remotely; sites you can access without being on NMCI; sites you may need that are only accessible from NMCI; and a list of [best practices](#). To ensure this is accessible to everyone in the command, we also posted it on the NAVSEA COVID-19 page, <https://www.navsea.navy.mil/Resources/Coronavirus/>

In my last all hands message, I noted that the Navy has a limited number remote connections into NMCI. Our IT has looked into whether or not we can get more, and the answer is no. With that in mind, we have to be thoughtful in how we approach having a large number of people logging in remotely so we remain productive without overburdening the system. Here are some best practices you can start working on now:

- * If you have an NMCI iPhone, use that for all your e-mail as it does not count against the number of connections.

- * Set a schedule within your work group and have designated times for people to log in, download e-mails and work items, and then log back out.
- * Log in before or after traditional work hours to download e-mails and work.
- * Prioritize your work so you focus on the highest-priority items in a potentially connectivity-constrained environment
- * Have phone trees that allow you to connect with your work team remotely and consider establishing a regular drumbeat to meet virtually to share information and the status of work products.

TRAVEL:

A lot has changed regarding travel since my last e-mail. As a matter of fact, a lot has changed since this email was prepped on Friday and completed on Saturday. Expect an email dedicated to travel in the next few days as we sort out the changes occurring in travel policies.

BEYOND PHYSICAL HEALTH:

Long-term stressful events like the COVID-19 outbreak can and will take a mental toll on us. Please remember we have resources available should we need to talk about our concerns.

For civilians, we have Magellan Ascend (<https://magellanascent.com/>), which took the place of the Department of the Navy Civilian Employee Assistance Program (DONCEAP). You can reach live counselors at any time, day or night, by calling 844-366-2327. This is a free service. You can speak to a licensed mental health professional who can help us cope with stress and anxiety.

For our active duty personnel and veterans, you can reach out to the Military Crisis Line 24-7 via phone at 800-273-825 Option 1, via text at 8388255, or on-line here: <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/get-help/military-crisis-line>.

You can also contact Military Onesource at <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/> or 800-342-9647 (CONUS). If you are OCONUS, the 800 number works, but additional options are available here: <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/international-calling-options>. Military

OneSource offers free and confidential non-medical counseling via phone and live chat, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Last topic. Many of you have been sending sites that you're using to track COVID-19's spread. I appreciate your sharing, but I will only share official information from established government or recognized international groups. There are two reasons – first, it's the official, fact-based, information. Second, we received reports yesterday about criminal groups using the COVID-19 to steal money and information. One set up a page to resemble a popular map for tracking the spread of COVID-19 that infects computers with a program built to steal information. Please be careful on where you go for information. The safest bet is the Center for Disease Control [<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>], World Health Organization [<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>], and the NAVSEA site <https://www.navsea.navy.mil/Resources/Coronavirus/>.

Folks -- A lot is happening and we're having to deal with unexpected changes, literally, overnight. Between school closures, empty store shelves, and the general sense of uncertainty it can be overwhelming. This is where the sense of calm urgency helps – understand what you can control, make a plan, and remain flexible to adjust to events that remain outside of your control.

Take care,

Jim