DATE: November 8, 2018

SUBJECT: Emergency Dismissals and Office Procedures

TO: All Oregon USDA NRCS, RD, FSA, OCIO-CEC, Soil Survey, NRCS National Centers, and FPAC Business Center Employees

The following agencies have agreed to a split policy, one for Field/County/Service Center and another for State Offices/National Centers regarding emergency dismissal and office closure with regards to USDA offices in Oregon: USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Rural Development (RD), Farm Service Agency (FSA), Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO), NRCS West National Technology Support Center (WNSTC), NRCS National Water and Climate Center (NWCC), NRCS West Remote Sensing Laboratory (WRSL), NRCS Soil Survey Region 1 and 2, and FPAC Business Center.

Service Center Employees in Oregon:
Decisions about office closures or delayed arrival times affecting field/county, basin, or satellite offices will be made jointly by the UFAC or designated acting of the USDA agencies located in the affected Service Centers or other shared office locations. Notification will be sent through the Supervisory Chain to the NRCS State Conservationist, the RD State Director, and the FSA State Executive Director (or designated acting’s for all as appropriate) when it becomes necessary to close an office, delay employee arrivals, or dismiss employees early. In addition, Service Center or other shared office location will develop a notification plan to communicate with affected employees. The designated supervisors will provide their employees with a plan for communicating additional information. Any office closure and/or delayed arrival time decision will be made with a priority for the Secretary of Agriculture’s vision for Best In Class Customer Service while balancing employee safety and wellbeing.

State Offices and National Center employees in Oregon:
Decisions about office closures or delayed arrival times affecting State Offices or National Centers for NRCS, FSA, and RD will be independent of each other based on each agency being located separately and other variables that affect these types of decisions. It is agreed each agency will communicate closure decisions early so the information is shared widely across the agencies.

For NRCS and FPAC Business Center only, the State Conservationist, Directors for the WNSTC, NWCC, WRSL, and Region 1 Soil Survey (or designated acting’s for all through joint consultation will make closure and/or delayed arrival decisions. A message will be left on the Hazardous Weather Mailbox which can be accessed by dialing 503-414-3299 for information. The absence of a message indicates that the office is open for business as usual.

For FSA only, the State Executive Director will make closure and/or delayed arrival decisions. Decisions will be communicated to staff consistent with office procedures.

For RD only, the State Director, in consultation with the Leadership Team, will make closure and/or delayed arrival decisions. A message will be left on the Hazardous Weather Mailbox which can be accessed by dialing 503-414-3399 for information. The absence of a message indicates that the office is open for business as usual.

The Emergency Dismissal and Office Closure Procedures policy is applicable to all employees of the affected agencies during situations that prevent a significant number of employees from reporting to work or that require agencies to shut-down all or part of their activities. Such emergency situations may include adverse weather conditions, natural disasters, and other incidents that cause the disruption of Government operations.

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First and foremost, employees are to presume their Oregon USDA office is open for business regardless of the weather conditions or emergency situations that may exist at the time. The leaders of the agencies will work together to make office closure decisions and announce them as quickly as possible. Employees should work with their supervisors to request use of their accrued leave, as needed, if the employee feels that conditions are so hazardous that they must delay their departure from home, leave work early, or stay at home.

The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) no longer advises agencies to cancel pre-approved leave for employees during office closures and consider the day as charged to administrative leave. Therefore, any approved leave during a period of an office closure will not be cancelled and employees will continue to be covered by the pre-approved leave request unless an extenuating circumstance exists. Here is how telework fits into office closures, early dismissal and late arrival:

- If it is an employee’s scheduled telework day, said employee must telework, otherwise the employee must request unscheduled leave.
- If an employee has either a core or an ad-hoc telework agreement and should have been aware of the pending storm (information was widely available from multiple news outlets that employees are expected to monitor), the employee is expected to telework. By having an approved telework agreement, the employee would be considered telework ready. This means the employee should be teleworking during office closures or early dismissals.
- Employees with no approved telework agreement will be granted Administrative Leave. When Administrative Leave is granted due to an office closure event, employees will code their time as appropriate to the guidance as provided by their specific agency through their supervisor.

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