



Dear Colleagues,

As we get closer to the two-year mark in this unprecedented public health emergency, I hope you and your families are doing well and staying safe. Over the past 20 months, the COVID-19 pandemic has had significant impacts on our mental and physical health, on the way we live, and on the way we work. First and foremost, I have been endlessly impressed by our ability to continue the work of the agency amid the public health crisis while helping to keep each other safe. Our approach moving forward will remain focused on the safety and well-being of the EPA's workforce and based on the most up-to-date data and science.

As part of my ongoing commitment to you to regularly communicate about agency planning efforts, I wanted to provide an update on our plans for an increased return to the workplace and expanded workplace flexibilities, including telework, remote work, and flexible work schedules. For this initial step, the return schedule and flexibilities are applicable only to non-bargaining unit employees, such as managers, supervisors, and certain employee groups. For the majority of EPA's workforce who are bargaining unit employees, we are continuing discussions with the unions about the details of the process we will follow to begin returning to the physical worksite. When available, all EPA employees will receive an additional email with more individualized information about applicable timelines and policies.



This is a long note, but these details are important, so please read on ...

Here is a snapshot of the planned schedule for an increased return to EPA facilities:

Senior political leadership will begin physically reporting November 22, joining the federal employees and on-site contractor personnel who are already physically reporting to EPA offices and laboratories to ensure that the agency meets its mission.

In December, the agency will post its updated workplace safety plan to our website, at which point employees are welcome and encouraged to voluntarily resume working at their physical worksites. I will send a mass mailer out when the updated workplace safety plan is available.

For bargaining unit employees, we are in the process of discussing with our union partners the details of transitioning out of maximum telework. We want to thank our union partners for continuing to work with the agency to ensure a safe and orderly return to the workplace and to update workplace flexibility policies. When all of the agency's bargaining obligations are met, **we will provide bargaining unit staff 45 days ample notice of their "no sooner than" date for return** as well as revised telework, remote work and workplace hours policies.

For non-bargaining unit employees, as of November 19, 2021, we are announcing a "no sooner than date," of January 3, 2022 to begin reentry to the workplace. This announcement honors our commitment to provide at least 45 days advanced notice. Specifically, on January 3, 2022, political appointees, SES, SL, ST, and Title 42 managers who physically report to an EPA worksite as part of their normal schedule will begin to report physically one day per week and increase their presence over three successive pay periods before establishing a normal schedule.

On January 31, 2022, supervisors, managers, and other non-bargaining unit employees who physically report to an EPA worksite as part of their normal schedule will begin to report physically one day per week and increase their presence over three successive pay periods before establishing a normal schedule.

Non-bargaining unit employees will receive additional information on how to apply for workplace flexibilities such as telework, remote work, and work schedules-- described further below-- and how to incorporate approved flexibilities into their future normal work schedule.

Increased Return to the Workplace

We understand that there are many challenges in returning to the workplace, especially given that most staff have not been back to the physical workplace since March of 2020. EPA is taking the utmost care throughout this transition, and our planning and decisions are always guided by your safety and the most up-to-date data and science. From the physical safety of our facilities to our travel policy—your safety is our top priority.

I'm immensely proud of how well we have operated throughout the pandemic, and at the same time, some of our work is not portable. And even with portable work, operating 100 percent remotely is not optimal for team building, mentoring, collaborative thinking, and other aspects of work life that make it productive, satisfying and enjoyable for many of us. Although many employees individually have been able to perform tremendously and have increased productivity and effectiveness while on maximum telework, fully carrying out our mission agency-wide requires an increased physical presence at EPA worksites. I hear from employees very satisfied with full-time telework and from others who are eager to return to their offices, at least for some days every week.

Your Feedback and the Future of Work

Our lives have changed, and EPA's policies are changing too. We are in the midst of a radical change in how people in and out of government think about and do their work. Your feedback is directly shaping EPA's Future of Work policies. We have finalized policies on [telework](#), [remote work](#), and [work schedules](#) for non-bargaining unit members. There will be employee training sessions in December and January where you can learn about the new policies and get additional information on eligibility and how to apply. Future communications will provide information on the new telework and remote work application forms and instructions for work schedule changes.

Our policies will evolve over time, and we will learn together. One thing that is clear from businesses and other organizations is that how we do our work is going to change. What makes sense today may well need to be adjusted as we learn what works and doesn't work over the coming months. I am committed to working with you and our labor partners to continue discussing, evaluating, and adjusting our policies. In order to ensure EPA continues to make decisions informed by the best available data and expertise, we will continue to communicate with staff, evaluate hybrid workforce implementation, and identify and implement best practices for a successful hybrid work environment.

Workplace safety measures. The agency will continue to follow guidance from the CDC and the [Safer Federal Workforce Task Force](#), which is charged with keeping federal employees safe during the pandemic and navigating the changing conditions. We are adhering to CDC and Safer Federal Workforce Task Force safety protocols for those who must report in person.

Increased flexibilities allow for customized work and transit schedules. Some staff have concerns about returning to the workplace setting, including concerns about commuting on public transportation or working in buildings with multiple offices. We understand your worries and will work with employees to implement expanded flexible schedule policies for telework, remote work, and work schedules that allow eligible employees to customize their schedule. We will continue to work with our union partners to design employee-centric policies. As scientists continue to emphasize, being vaccinated and wearing a mask in public places substantially reduces the risk.

Additional employee resources. We are excited to announce the agency is in the process of developing a new EPA 2022 Future of Work intranet site that will include more details on future of work planning and will be frequently updated as new information becomes available. In the meantime, if you have questions in the coming weeks, you can speak with your supervisor or you can send an email to futureofwork@epa.gov. We will all need patience, understanding and flexibility with ourselves and each other as we move towards the next phase of work at EPA.

Again, thank you so very much for all your hard work during this difficult time and I look forward to seeing you in the halls of headquarters, in the regions, and virtually soon!

Janet McCabe
Deputy Administrator