
August 21, 2020

SUBJECT: INF - COVID-19 Operational Updates and Expectations

FILE CODE: 260-0

TO: All NRCS Employees

I wanted to send a memo to clarify a few operational status items relating to how we will continue to be successful in the COVID-19 operational postures and do our best to keep everyone safe. The State Food and Ag Council (SFAC) continues to meet bi-weekly to re-evaluate our statewide reopening posture and discuss hot topics that relate to each agency. I want to address topics such as employee meeting participation, training and travel, and wearing of masks. Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) has been very clear about laying out their operational expectations but the framework does allow every state to implement those expectations based on statewide conditions and guidance from the governor and local health departments.

Masks:

The updated FPAC mask guidance was released on June 8, 2020. It is attached. In addition, the Governor has currently signed an executive order mandating the use of masks statewide. It is my expectation that all our employees will be following the FPAC and Governor's guidance. The bottom line is if you are meeting with a customer in or out of the office, wear your mask; sharing a vehicle, wear your mask; attending meeting, wear your mask; regardless of whether you can social distant or not, it is a good practice to wear a mask. If your health does not allow you to wear a face mask, you need to raise your concerns to your supervisor to investigate possible alternatives. Employees that purposefully disregard the appropriate mask guidance can be subject to disciplinary actions.

Training and Travel:

I realize the current operational posture has created new challenges for employee training and operational type meetings. However, several of you have succeeded in being creative and finding new ways to deliver necessary training to address current employee needs. We must continue to find ways to provide training. Larger trainings and meetings above 30 attendees, for example, are allowed, but should be minimized as much as possible under the current operating posture. If employees attend trainings, safety must be a top priority. The best training scenarios are where they can be held outside and social distancing is in place. Be mindful that the Governor's order on meeting sizes can change and each local health department can impose tighter meeting restrictions than the statewide order.

Some trainings may require travel. All training sessions should minimize travel for employee safety. Most indoor-type trainings and meetings should first consider virtual options. The SFAC has also agreed that external partner meetings, including but not limited to Soil and Water Conservation District Board and County Committees, should not occur in service centers until Phase 4 is achieved for that office. If at any point prior to or during a training/meeting an employee feels their health is at risk, they do not have to participate. Employees should communicate their concern with the supervisor and inform them of their non-participation.

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Personal Travel:

While travelling out of state for work is currently a rare event, I anticipate personal travel will continue to occur as this is a popular personal vacation time for many employees. Currently, FPAC and the SFAC have not set a “hard” mandate on quarantining upon returning from personal travel. Please work with your supervisor prior to your leave so a plan is in place upon your return. As a general rule, most out of state travel will have an expectation that you telework for 5-7 days upon your return. If you travel to or through a nationally designated COVID-19 “hot spot” (i.e. – California, New York, etc.) then considerations need to be made to telework for a full 14 days prior to entering the office.

I want to thank you for all your efforts to keep your fellow employees and customers as safe as possible while maintaining a high level of customer service. These are new times for us all and we are doing our best to continue to offer high quality service, protect employees and customers, and capture the positives from this experience to make us better in the future.

Sincerely,

 Digitally signed by JERRY
RAYNOR
Date: 2020.08.21 11:32:38 -04'00'

JERRY RAYNOR
State Conservationist