

**Town of Deep River
POLICY / PROCEDURE MANUAL**

Corporate Policies and Procedures				
DEPARTMENT: Human Resources			POLICY NO.: H-013	
POLICY NAME Disconnecting from Work				
DATE OF ORIGIN:	REVIEW DATE:	REVISION DATE:	APPLICABLE TO:	PAGE NUMBERS:
June 22, 2022			All Employees / Intranet	1 to 4

STATEMENT:

The Town of Deep River is committed to providing policies and procedures designed to help employees balance their work and personal responsibilities by respecting that an employee should be able to disconnect from work-related duties outside of their regularly scheduled hours. As an organization, the Town recognizes how the inability to disconnect from the workplace and its stressors, negatively impacts the mental wellness and physical well-being of its employees. This policy has been established to take appropriate steps towards decreasing work-related stress and encouraging a healthy work-life balance for all employees.

Disconnecting from work as defined by the *Employment Standards Act, 2000* (the 'ESA') is "not engaging in work-related communications, including emails, telephone calls, video calls or the sending or reviewing of other messages, so as to be free from the performance of work".

This policy applies to all employees at the Town worksites including any alternative worksites approved through the Town's Telecommuting Policy.

PRINCIPLES / PROCEDURE

This policy does not alter or replace the terms of an existing employment contract. Employees must comply with all of Town of Deep River rules, policies, practices and protocols.

Work hours, compensation, and leave scheduling will continue to conform to applicable policies and agreements.

Requests to work overtime or use time in lieu must be approved by the employee's Manager / Director / CAO in the same manner.

NOTE: All terms and conditions of an employee's employment contract continue to apply where the employee is working onsite, from home, or an alternate location.

Working Hours

Employees will be informed of their expected regular working hours, break time entitlements, and their ability to disconnect from work outside of these hours, including leave, vacation, or sick time, will be respected in accordance with relevant collective agreement obligations and / or Town policies.

Communications

There may arise legitimate situations when it is necessary to contact employees outside of normal working hours to meet the needs of residents and Town operations. This should be the exception rather than the rule.

Communications made outside of an employee's normal working hours for the purpose of shift allocation, call-ins, or standby, are still subject to the relevant collective agreement obligations and / or Town policies.

It is important that the tone and sense of urgency in written communications be proportionate especially when sent outside of normal working hours as to avoid disrespecting an employees' right to disconnect. It is easy to misinterpret urgency in communications sent via text or e-mail and where appropriate adding a subject line to an email or a footer to any email signature to indicate normal hours of work and that an immediate response is not expected.

Telephone communication may be favoured for matters that require an immediate response or action based on an increased level of urgency not remediable through written communication, although this is at the discretion of the Employee initiating the phone communication it should not be used regularly or inappropriately.

Scheduling of Meetings

Any meetings, whether virtual or face-to-face will be scheduled with consideration as to appropriate team composition.

Avoiding lunch hour meetings (between 12:00-13:00) is a way of encouraging Employees to disconnect from work during their respective lunch breaks. Additionally, ending

meetings at appropriate times to avoid extending beyond normal hours of work is another consideration when scheduling meetings in the workplace.

Out-of-Office Notifications / Automatic Replies

Employees who will be absent from their office during regular working hours are required to enable 'Out-of-Office' notifications, on their e-mail and voicemail, with automatic replies indicating the dates they will be absent and when they anticipate responding to communications. This measure is to be respected by all employees and there should be no expectation of a response during the period identified in the 'Out-of-Office' notification.

If an employee is absent from their office during normal work hours and does not enable Out-of-Office notifications, then it may be assumed that they will be available to respond to communications despite being away from their office.

It is helpful for employees to include alternate contact information for other members of their department if appropriate. Another measure that can encourage employees to disconnect from work outside of normal working hours is to include a statement of 'increased volume of communications' and to indicate an estimated time to respond to general queries and urgent matters.

Workplace Health and Well-Being Supports

Maintaining a healthy work-life balance has become increasingly important in municipal environments and the Town is committed to taking steps to reduce the impact that prolonged exposure to work-related stress has on its employees by:

- Communicating this policy to all new employees as part of their onboarding process, with relevant information on working hours, leave entitlements, and rest periods / breaks in the employee's written contract of employment and notify the employee in writing of any changes; and
- Encouraging employees to raise any concerns they may have about their ability to disconnect from work; and
- Promoting work-life balance and taking appropriate action if employees show signs of not disconnecting from work, considering factors such as patterns of excessive acceptance of voluntary overtime and missed periods of rest.
- Supporting and maintaining open channels of communication between Managers and employees to set effective and respectful boundaries around work hours and disconnecting from work; and.
- Providing training for Office 365 relating to Out-of-Office Notifications, Automatic Replies, and Delayed Sending Features.

Raising Concerns

This policy provides measures to be taken and / or considered to mitigate the risks associated with increased work-related stress and the Town understands that employees may experience issues related to disconnecting from work and are encouraged to raise these concerns to their immediate Supervisor / Manager / Senior Leader.

It is important that these concerns are raised respectfully and addressed in a timely manner. Employees should be made aware of the appropriate chain of command for raising concerns in their department.

Managers are expected to treat the situation with an appropriate degree of respect for the well-being of their team member and to make changes if feasible to mitigate risks in the department. Furthermore, any employee who raises a concern or sets a boundary related to disconnecting from work will not face disciplinary action for doing so.