



Study Derides Federal Telework Efforts: \$13.9 Billion Deficit

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If all the government's eligible teleworkers worked from home, the Federal government could save \$13.9 billion in commuting costs annually and eliminate 21.5 billion pounds of pollutants from the environment each year.

The "Telework Eligibility Profile: Feds Fit the Bill" study is based on a survey of 664 Federal employees found that of those respondents, 96% of them should be teleworking, yet only 20% do. In fact, the Federal government telework deficit is equivalent to the gross domestic product of Jamaica, the study said.

To offset the amount of CO2 emissions Feds disperse in the environment by commuting, we would need to plant 32 million trees a year said Stephen W.T. O'Keeffe, executive director of the Telework Exchange, a public-private think-tank focused on telework in the federal government that did the study.

Complicating the problem: 42% of respondents were not aware if they are eligible to telework or not. If just those folks who are unaware of their telework status could telework full time, they would collectively save \$5 billion in commuting costs and spare the environment 7.7 billion pounds of pollutants annually, the study found.

What's more, little has changed in the Federal telework arena since a similar Telework Exchange study last January. Then the researchers said that despite legislative efforts to spur increased telework, Federal worker awareness remains low. Among 214 federal managers surveyed, 47% think their agencies don't support telework, and 18% are unsure. In addition, resistance from managers is keeping federal agencies from embracing telework as a standard operating procedure. Respondents who don't manage teleworkers ranked fear of not having control over employees' activities (77%) and productivity concerns (63%) as the top telework inhibitors.

A recent Network World article noted that by law, all executive agencies should be enabling eligible employees to telecommute. Public Law 106-346, which went into effect Oct. 23, 2000, called for agencies to increase telework participation by 25% of the federal

workforce annually, until 100% of eligible employees “participate in telecommuting to the maximum extent possible without diminished employee performance.”

But more than seven years later, federal telework adoption is still painfully lagging. Only 9.5% of the more than 1.2 million federal employees who were eligible in 2005 to work from an alternative site did so at least once a month, according to survey data released last year by the Office of Personnel Management.

Legislators have made continued efforts to speed up adoption (and penalize those that don't comply), including the proposed Telework Enhancement Act, which was approved by the U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee in November.