



POLICY No. 2022-02

Disconnecting From Work Policy

Originating Department Human Resources

SMT Approval: 2022-05-12

Council in Committee: 2022-05-31

Recommendation #: 12

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Revision History:

[Click here for revision history](#)

1. PURPOSE

Haldimand County acknowledges work-related pressures and the inability to disconnect from work can lead to stress and deterioration of mental health and overall well-being.

This policy has been developed to encourage and support employees in balancing their working and personal lives, whether working normal hours of work, flexible working hours, in the workplace or remotely. Specifically, it is intended to ensure employees are aware of their right to disconnect, without repercussions, and to encourage disconnection from work, where possible, as an important part of achieving a healthy and sustainable work-life balance

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to all Employees, as defined by the Ontario *Employment Standards Act, 2022* (“ESA”), including students, whether they are working remotely or in the workplace and regardless of their normal hours of work. For clarity, “employee” under this Policy does not include Members of Council, Volunteer Firefighters, Committee / Board appointees, Haldimand County Library Board employees, volunteers or contractors.

3. DEFINITIONS

3.1. Disconnecting from work: to not engage 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.

3.2. Normal Working Hours: An employee’s normal working hours are as set out in their employment letter and/or applicable collective agreement or policy governing non-union employees. Normal working hours for employees may vary based on position,

division, individual work schedules, approved working arrangements and/or participation in the County's Flex Time program. Where unsure of normal working hours, an employee and supervisor should meet to clarify expectations.

4. RESPONSIBILITIES

4.1. Employer Obligations

The County will make efforts to ensure that all employees are:

- informed of what their normal working hours are reasonably expected to be and the circumstances in which they will be expected to engage in work-related communications outside their normal working hours;
- able to take applicable meal, rest periods and hours free from work as required by law, contract and/or applicable collective agreement language; and
- able to take vacation or other leave entitlements as required by law, contract and/or applicable collective agreement language, subject to operational needs and timing of such leave entitlements must be approved in advance.

The County will post, provide access to and retain this policy in accordance with related legislation.

4.2. Employee Obligations

The County expects all employees to:

- record working time accurately and within the parameters of related policies
- update their working status (e.g. out-of-office messages), including when they are not available during normal working hours, working remotely, or when flexing hours;
- be mindful of normal working hours for colleagues', customers', vendors' and other third parties' and to respect other's need to disconnect from work regularly;
- ensure that they take ownership of their work and meet deadlines and meet the County's operational needs;
- comply with applicable flex or overtime policies, including any requirements to obtain prior approval before performing overtime work; and
- speak with their supervisor or manager if they feel their workload is preventing them from being able to disconnect from work on a regular basis. If the matter is not resolved, concerns should be submitted in writing to their supervisor or manager, and if still not resolved, employees can direct their concerns or issues to Human Resources.

5. PROCEDURE

5.1. ABILITY TO DISCONNECT FROM WORK

Employees generally have the right to disconnect from their work outside of their normal working day, without fear of reprisal. Employees are encouraged to set clear boundaries between their work and personal lives.

The ability to disconnect means that employees:

- can and should stop performing their job duties and work-related tasks when they are not expected to work;
- are not expected or required to respond to work-related communication outside their regular working hours, while on break, or during any paid or unpaid time off;
- are encouraged to utilize their scheduled breaks and time off entitlements for non-work related activities; and
- will not face repercussion or be penalized for not communicating or continuing to work outside of their regular working hours. However, if work outside of the regular working hours is scheduled or required/approved, as outlined in this policy, then such work becomes an expectation and cannot be ignored.

Employees may be required to work outside of their normal working hours, in accordance with the applicable Collective Agreement, Policy Governing Non-union Employees and/or the County's Flex Time Policy.

Employees who, on a regular basis, cannot manage their workload during their regularly scheduled hours should meet with their direct Supervisor to evaluate their current workload, priorities, and due dates. Supervisors will work with employees to come up with a solution to ensure regular job duties can be completed during their normal work day.

5.2. COMMUNICATION

5.2.1. Employees should recognize that there is no organizational expectation of immediate response outside of their normal work day, and except as outlined in 5.3, they retain the right to disconnect at the end of their normal work day.

5.2.2. Where possible, work related communication should be checked or sent during normal working hours. Due to differing work schedules across departments, some employees may send communications at times which are inopportune for other employees, such as evenings, weekends or on scheduled time off. The sender should be respectful of others' right to disconnect and should not expect others to respond, communicate, or complete work outside of their normal working hours, with exception of unforeseen circumstances, such as an emergency, or in relation to those reasons outlined in 5.3.3.

5.2.3. Whenever possible, communication sent outside normal working hours that requires immediate or prompt response, the response expectations should be set out in the communication

5.3. EXCEPTIONS

5.3.1. Despite the establishment of normal working hours, it is recognized that there may be busier periods or other circumstances where employees may want or need to work outside of their normal working hours to meet a time-sensitive deadline,

to attend a required after-hours meeting, attend an urgent or emergency matter, or due to unforeseen circumstances; however, employees are not required to regularly or frequently work outside of their scheduled hour to complete or catch up on work.

5.3.2. Some employees are required to participate in an on-call/pager rotation in accordance with their Collective Agreement or Policy Governing Non-Union Employees. For the purposes of this policy, an employee being compensated to be on-call or who is subsequently called-in does not have the right to disconnect from work related to the reasons for being on-call (communication unrelated to being on-call may be addressed during normal working hours).

5.3.3. All Managers, General Managers and the CAO are expected to be available to respond to emergencies whenever possible. This may result in managers requiring to be contacted and work outside of normal working hours, from time to time, as compensated for through enhanced vacation entitlement outlined in the Policy Governing Non-Union Employees. This expectation is informal and not expected to take place on a regular basis, but important due to the nature of management roles. Managers are encouraged to raise concerns with their General Manager or CAO if they experience difficulty in disconnecting from work on a regular or frequent basis.

5.3.4. There will be some situations when it is necessary, and appropriate, to contact employees outside of their normal working hours for work related reasons, including but not limited to:

- checking availability for scheduling;
- to fill in on short notice for a colleague who has called in sick or is unavailable for work;
- arranging a return to work, investigation, grievance or other meeting;
- where unforeseeable circumstances may arise;
- where an emergency may arise;
- where employees voluntarily wish to communicate with one another for work-related purposes outside of their normal working hours; or
- other business or operational reasons that require contact outside of an employee's normal working hours.

Nothing in this Policy precludes a member of the public, Council or other County employees from contacting employees outside their normal working hours, or standard business hours, for circumstances as outlined above, or as otherwise required to meet operational needs, subject to any rights or other entitlements the receiving colleague or employee may have under the Ontario *Employment Standards Act, 2000* (the "ESA"). The parameters outlined in this policy are meant as a guide in responding to such communication.

This policy does not afford employees a “right to disconnect” beyond what is within their individual agreements, but aims to clarify the expectation that the employee should be able to disconnect regularly. Nothing in this policy is intended to amend or supersede any grievance procedure or other aspect of an applicable collective agreement.

5.4. TIME AWAY FROM WORK

5.4.1. Haldimand County values the importance of planned time off, away from work. Employees are expected to use their allotted vacation time, lieu time or other banked entitlement, in accordance with their Collective Agreement, Policy Governing Non Union Employees, and other related policy, for rest, relaxation and personal pursuits.

Prior to taking planned time off, employees should discuss with their supervisor any job duties that need to be completed in their absence and to delegate job-specific duties to maintain workflow and productivity.

Employees are discouraged from cancelling planned time off as a result of workload pressures, except where unforeseen circumstances or other urgent operational needs warrant it.

5.4.2. In an effort to promote the principles of disconnecting from work, access to technology resources, including access to the County’s network, will be restricted when an employee is on certain leaves of absences from work. As a guideline, resources will be temporarily suspended when:

- An employee’s absence is directly related to workplace stressors or is experiencing symptoms which is likely to impact their ability to make good judgement with respect to work and/or disconnecting from work; or
- An employee is on an approved leave of absence, other than vacation, which is expected to be longer than 30 days in duration.

Supervisors will be cognizant of differing reactions among employees having access removed and will endeavor to communicate planned actions promptly and respectfully. Whenever possible, Employees and Supervisors will discuss upcoming leaves of absence, including any urgent or incidental issues to be completed before access is removed, completed on the employees behalf or re-directed to other employees as the case may warrant. Where a discussion is not possible, or there are discrepancies in how the employee/supervisor wish to proceed the manager, with consultation from the General Manager, as necessary shall provide direction.

Related, the County will take steps in maintaining access for staff on leave to the County’s intranet for the purposes of information sharing and remaining connected.

6. REFERENCE

This Policy should be read alongside the County’s Flex Time Policy, Working Remotely Policy, applicable collective agreement or policy governing non-union employees, various health and safety policies and guidelines, relevant and applicable legislation, and any other policy that may become applicable and/or relevant.

7. ATTACHMENTS

None

REVISION HISTORY					
REPORT	CIC		COUNCIL		DETAILS
	Date	Rec#	Date	Res#	
	Date	Rec#	Date	Res#	
	Date	Rec#	Date	Res#	
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