

To: Information Technology Advisory Committee (ITAC)
From: Regional Computer Specialists
Subject: Proposed Guidance for Support of USGS Employees and Contractors using Government Computers at Private Residences and Privately Owned Computers to perform Government Duties

The attached guidance document is provided to ITAC in response to action item Sep2002.AL.1, assigned during ITAC's September, 2002, meeting in Montgomery, Alabama. The action item states: "RCSers will draft off-site support site administration guidelines by October 15 (with regard to Home Support Policy)." Attachments 2 and 3 are included for the information of ITAC, and not to be distributed with the enclosed memo.

Attachments – 3

Attachment 1

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To: WRD District Chiefs and Computer System Administrators
From: Information Technology Advisory Committee (ITAC)
Subject: Proposed Guidance for Support of USGS Employees and Contractors using Government Computers at Private Residences and/or Privately Owned Computers to Perform Government Duties

The purpose of this memo is to provide guidance to cost-center managers and computer support staff who are faced with the issue of supporting USGS employees and contractors who use (1) Government computers at private residences and/or (2) privately owned computers to perform Government duties. For purposes of this memo, "privately owned computer" is defined as a computer owned by an USGS employee/contractor, USGS employee/contractor family member, or entity other than Federal, State, or local government. The terms "home computer" and "home" are used interchangeably with "privately owned computer" and "private residence," respectively. In addition, it is important to understand that all "appropriate use" policies of the USGS and Department of Interior apply to all Government computers at all times, regardless of where these computers are used.

The subject issue has been driven by factors including the proliferation of home computers and the growing capabilities of the "home computer environment;" the desire of employees to perform work-related tasks during evenings and weekends; the granting of Flexiplace privileges to employees; and an increased use of mobile computing. Employees who use Government computers at home or who use their privately owned computers to perform Government duties often require assistance with computer configurations, telecommunications, and a wide range of matters that constitute "computer support" needs. Although hardware and software providers, Internet service providers, and local computer service providers are suitable sources for most home computer support needs, USGS employees often call upon USGS computer support staff for assistance. The role and responsibilities of employees/contractors who perform Government duties at "home" and of USGS computer support staff in these situations is often completely undefined. The issue is significant for reasons including the possible lack of adequate and consistent support of home users performing Government duties and the probable over-commitment of computer support staff, if roles and responsibilities are not clear.

The issue is complicated by interdependencies between hardware, software, configuration settings, and telecommunication settings that can turn even the simplest requests for home support into a complex series of problems and actions. Conversely, security vulnerabilities of the home computer can present unacceptable vulnerabilities to Government computers in the office.

It is important for cost-center management to discuss the issue with computer support staff and to decide upon a reasonable definition of what to support—and what not to support—when it comes to use of Government computers at private residences, as well as the use of privately owned computers to perform Government duties. The following factors should be considered in the decision-making process.

- 1) USGS Flexiplace policy regarding computers is available on-line, and discusses responsibilities of the employee's supervisor and of the employee. See <http://internal.usgs.gov/ops/hro/benefits/flexplce/flexplce.html#furniture>
In addition to these requirements, it is acceptable to expect the employee to apply vendor-recommended security patches to the operating system and applications.
- 2) USGS Flexiplace policy regarding access to Privacy Act, sensitive, proprietary, or classified data is available on-line, and discusses responsibilities of the employee's supervisor and of the employee. See <http://internal.usgs.gov/ops/hro/benefits/flexplce/flexplce.html#privacyact>
- 3) Privately owned computers accessing Government computers through the USGS VPN Service must be protected by at least a software firewall. USGS policies and requirements are defined at the USGS VPN Web site, <http://online.wr.usgs.gov/remotaccess/vpn/>
- 4) It is important for employees to understand that any work performed on a privately owned computer on behalf of the Government is property of the Government—including Government records stored on the privately owned computer. If a privately owned computer is used to perform Government duties, if software licensed to the Government is installed on a privately owned computer, or if the Government pays for any portion of the telecommunications service used to connect a privately owned computer to Government computers, then the Government has the right to perform security scans on the privately owned computer and to inspect the privately owned computer. In addition, the privately owned computer could be subpoenaed or subject to court ordered action. [Verify with Bill Silver, Solicitor, c/o Tammy Bagley.]
- 5) It is possible that computer support staff may encounter illegal software, storage of pornography, or evidence of criminal activity on a privately owned computer. According to Department of Interior and USGS Ethics personnel, personal property—even if used for Government work—is under no Government workplace regulations; private use of private property is the owner's right of choice, and is not subject to Federal workplace regulations. Likewise, there are no requirements for a Federal employee to report such activities; however, as a citizen, a Federal employee may certainly choose to report illegal activity to the appropriate authorities. Encountering such material places the computer support person in a very awkward position, particularly when working on a home computer used by a number of family members. Before working on the home computer, computer support staff should discuss this issue with the home computer owner and agree on what should be done if such material is encountered.

It is also possible that computer support staff may accidentally damage a privately owned computer when attempting to configure the computer for Government work. In this

scenario, liability is at question and should be addressed by management upfront. Inversely, computer support staff may properly configure a privately owned computer for Government work, and later find that the computer was subsequently mis-configured by the actions of a family member. If repeated problems occur with a privately owned computer requiring attention by USGS computer support staff, the employee should be provided a Government computer to be used exclusively for Government duties and one that has the appropriate security and configuration measures in place.

- 6) Cost-center management, cost-center supervisors, and the computer site administrator should agree, up-front, to the constraints of support to be provided:
 - a) Define what privately owned hardware and software will be supported, if any. Define the locations at which the support will be provided. Approaches presently or potentially used by districts to provide computer support services for computers used in private residences are:
 - i. Government computers used at private residences will be supported only when brought into the office.
 - ii. Government computers used at private residences will be supported when brought into the office and by making house calls.
 - iii. Government and privately owned computers used at private residences will be supported only when brought into the office.
 - iv. Government and privately owned computers used at private residences will be supported when brought into the office and by making house calls.

Other support options include providing computer support to the employee at home over the telephone or by remote connection.

The recommended approach is (i). USGS computer support staff should configure the computer for remote access with all patches and security fixes installed and then maintain updates to that computer while it is off site. If problems occur with that computer that cannot be resolved remotely, the employee can return the CPU to USGS computer support staff for repair.

- b) Define which individuals are to receive this support service.

NOTE: There may be safety issues involved when Federal computers support staff make "house calls" to private residences.

Attachment 2 – Results of Western Region Survey of Home Computer Support

[Paste Graig's survey results here. HomeSupAttach2.doc]

Attachment 3 – Existing Cost-Center Policies

A few cost-center policies were discovered during the writing of this guidance.

California District – See

VPN Policy and Procedures – Word Document

Policy Outline for PPP – Word Document

Colorado District – See

Colorado District Flexiplace/Remote Computer Technology Agreement

http://co.water.usgs.gov/usgs/Computer/CODist_%2FFlexiplace.html