



United States
Department of
Agriculture

AUG 30 2005

Office of the
Assistant Secretary
for Administration

DECISION MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY

1400 Independence
Avenue SW

Washington, DC
20250-0103

FROM: Michael James Harrison
Assistant Secretary
for Administration

SUBJECT: Emergency Actions in Response to Hurricane Katrina

ISSUE: To recommend that the Secretary exercise his full authority to grant excused absences to USDA employees adversely impact by Hurricane Katrina and take advantage of all flexibilities available to enhance USDA's response to that natural disaster.

DISCUSSION: Hurricane Katrina has had a devastating affect on Florida, the Gulf Coast states and, to an extent as yet unknown, on points northward. The impact has fallen on both USDA employees and on its customers. In order to mitigate and recover from the consequences of this hurricane, you may exercise certain authorities already under your control and direct Departmental Administration (DA) to work with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to take advantage of certain other operating flexibilities available for such emergencies. This memorandum recommends the following interim actions:

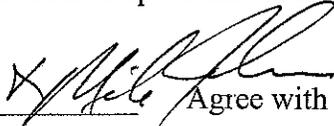
1. **Excused Absences:** Employees who are unable to work either because their worksite is out of commission or due to a personal storm-related emergency should be granted excused leave. It is difficult to predict how long excused leave should be permitted under these circumstances, as the recovery process will be uneven both in time and geography. I therefore recommend that the grant of excused absence should run from Monday, August 29 through next Tuesday, September 6. On September 6, a determination will be made as to extensions of excused absences.
2. **Leave Sharing:** I recommend that you direct DA to secure OPM approval to set up a leave sharing program for employees who are still unable to return to work for the reasons noted above. Under this program, USDA employees with positive leave balances may donate some of their leave for this purpose.

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3. **Premium Pay for Overtime Work:** Many employees who can work will be assigned demanding duties in connection with business continuity and recovery actions. These employees may be required to work extraordinary hours. I recommend that the regular bi-weekly cap on allowable overtime pay be waived, and instead the permissible amount of total compensation be governed by the annual aggregate of regular and premium pay of GS-15, step 10, or Executive Schedule V, whichever is greater.
4. **Emergency Critical Hiring:** We ask that you authorize local managers working to restore USDA services to hire needed staff directly for a period of 30 days and to extend those appointments for another 30 days if deemed necessary.
5. **Temporary Employment Firms:** Agencies may contract with temporary services for a period of 120 days – and may extend those contracts for another 120 days if necessary.
6. **Dependent Assistance for Employees Relocated for Continuity of Operations:** Direct DA to work with OPM and the Office of the General Counsel to explore the possibility of affording travel and subsistence for dependents who are unable to return to their residences to accompany their USDA spouses to a separate Continuity of Operations Emergency Relocation Facility site.
7. **Employee Assistance Fund:** Obtain authority from OPM to establish a fundraising capability to assist employees in need. The details of this would need to be worked out but obtaining OPM authority is a required first step.

RECOMMENDATION: I recommend that you authorize all measures outlined above in order to speed the recovery of our impacted employees and services to the public.



_____ Agree with all seven recommendations

_____ Approve the recommendations enumerated to the left

_____ Disagree with these recommendations at this time

Date

8/30/05