

SECTION: Human Resources		POLICY #: HR-008
Date Approved:		Disconnecting from Work
Revision Date:	Review Date:	
Authority: Report HR-04-22		

1.0 POLICY STATEMENT

The health and wellbeing of Town of Hanover (Town) employees is of the utmost importance and the Town encourages and supports employees in prioritizing their own wellbeing. Disconnecting from work, when possible, is important for an individual's wellbeing, and helps employees achieve a healthy and sustainable work-life balance.

The Town recognizes that every employee has the right to, and should, disconnect from work outside of their normal working hours unless there is an emergency or agreement to not do so in such incidents as designated and/or compensated for being on standby or on-call or as included in an employee's job description and/or Collective Agreement or Town policy or procedure.

2.0 PURPOSE

To encourage and support employees in balancing their working and personal lives, whether working traditional hours in the workplace or remotely, this Policy is being implemented to encourage employees to disconnect from work where possible after fulfilling their required hours based on their individual employment contracts or applicable collective agreement or Town policy and procedure provisions.

3.0 SCOPE

This policy applies to all employees of the Town, including full-time, part-time, contract, casual, and students, as well as members of council, although it is primarily intended for those who can remain connected to the workplace outside their regular hours of work because of their use and/or access to their personal and/or Town-issued technology, including through remote work.

This Policy does not apply in situations where an employee voluntarily wishes to communicate with another employee for work-related purposes outside of their normal working hours.

This Policy should be read alongside the Town's associated policies and procedures including, but not limited to health and safety, accommodation, any relevant and applicable legislation, and any other policy or procedure that may become applicable and/or relevant. Unionized employees should consult their collective agreement for any deviations from this policy.

4.0 DEFINITIONS

Disconnecting From Work: Not engaging in work-related communications, including emails, telephone calls, video calls or sending or reviewing other messages, to be free from the performance of work.

Hours of Work: Includes hours of work for a department or position based on operational requirements and/or as outlined in collective agreements or other Town policies and procedures, including:

- Daytime, evening, weekday and/or weekend shifts;
- Scheduled on-call and/or standby shifts; or
- Alternative hours of work as agreed to by an employee and their supervisor or designate.

Emergency: A situation or impending situation that requires timely or immediate attention and/or action.

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Unforeseen Circumstance(s): An unforeseeable incident or occurrence that unless addressed can reasonably lead to an adverse impact on the Town's services, programs and /or impacts the health and safety of employees or the community.

Work: Executing employment duties and/or responsibilities including, but not limited to, engaging in work-related communications, i.e., telephone calls, text messages, emails, and video calls.

5.0 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

To build a culture where employees feel supported to disconnect from work, it is important to recognize that everyone has obligations, and a joint approach is required as outlined below:

5.1 The Town of Hanover:

The Town will make efforts to ensure that all employees, regardless of their place of work, are:

- a) Informed of what their normal working hours are reasonably expected to be and are informed of the circumstances in which they will be expected to engage in work-related communications outside their normal working hours;
- b) Able to take applicable meal, rest periods and hours free from work as required by law, policy and/or applicable collective agreement language; and,
- c) Able to take vacation or other leave entitlements as required by law, policy and/or applicable collective agreement language.

5.2 Managers/Supervisors will:

- a) Where on-call and/or standby employees are not available, establish appropriate communication methods with employees for emergencies and unforeseen circumstances.
- b) Not penalize an employee for acting in compliance with this policy or reporting concerns related to ability to disconnect from work.
- c) Model appropriate disconnect behaviours after their own regular hours of work finish for the workday.

5.3 Employees will:

- a) Read and acknowledge the policy.
- b) Perform the required hours of work as specified for their position which includes any on-call, standby or emergency response requirements of their role.
- c) Cooperate fully with any applicable mechanism utilised by the Town to record working time or update their working status, including when working remotely.
- d) Be mindful of the working hours of other staff.

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- e) Respect every employee's right to disconnect from work, particularly by not routinely contacting them outside the normal hours of work, except in the event of an emergency and/or when operational requirements require contact through communication methods established with the employee directly or through the appropriate collective agreement.
- f) Follow on-call and standby processes, where applicable, for emergencies and unforeseen circumstances.
- g) Take break periods in accordance with Employment Standards Act (ESA) entitlements.
- h) Schedule and use allotted annual vacation entitlements.
- i) Report any concerns or issues they feel is impacting their ability to disconnect from work. Employees are encouraged to report such concerns to their immediate supervisor, or where not appropriate for the matter, report to their Director or Human Resources.
- j) Activate out of office notifications when away for an extended period that indicates the start and end date of the leave period and an alternative contact, where applicable.
- k) Notify their Supervisor of any right or entitlement they were unable to exercise and why.

5.4 Human Resources will:

- a) Provide a copy of the written policy to each employee within 30 days of preparing or amending this policy.
- b) Provide a copy of the written policy to every new employee at the time of orientation within 30 days of the date of commencement of employment.
- c) Ensure that supervisors and employees are aware of, and comply with, related legislation in all jurisdictions such as the ESA and applicable collective agreements.
- d) Support problem solving where challenges are experienced in disconnecting from work.

6.0 POLICY

6.1 General

- a) An employee's ability to disconnect from work depends on the Town's operational needs and the duties and obligations of the employee's position, subject to policy, procedure, applicable collective agreement and/or their minimum statutory entitlements under the ESA.
- b) Nothing in this Policy precludes the Town or other employees of the Town from contacting colleagues outside of what may be considered normal working hours, subject to any rights or entitlements the receiving colleague may have under policy, applicable collective agreement and/or their minimum statutory entitlements under the ESA.
- c) Employees who are on-call and/or on standby for emergencies, unforeseen circumstances and/or operational requirements, should be contacted first wherever possible, as outlined in the applicable collective agreements or other policies and procedures.

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- d) Employees may need to be occasionally contacted outside of their hours of work if an emergency or an unforeseeable circumstance arises, and/or when operational requirements arise. This contact will be made through communication methods established between the Supervisor and the employee.
- e) Where a supervisor, other staff member, council or committee member, or member of the public communicates outside an employee's regular hours of work and no immediate response is required, employees should not feel they need to respond until their next scheduled hours of work.
- f) All employees should be mindful when sending work-related emails, texts, calls or other communications, recognizing the working hours of other staff and appropriate methods of communication. Due to differing work schedules, some staff may need to send work-related communications to others who are not scheduled to work at that same time. Recipients of those communications should be mindful of their responsibility to disconnect from work and consider this prior to checking and/or responding to communications outside normal hours of work, in accordance with their position responsibilities.
- g) There may be situations where employees voluntarily wish to communicate with another employee for work-related purposes outside of their normal working hours and this policy would not apply in those situations.
- h) Employees should use communication methods such as out-of-office alerts, voice message notices and/or calendar settings to indicate their hours of work. This may include specifying hours of work in calendars electronic calendars, recording time off in electronic personal and/or shared calendars, and marking appropriate times in electronic calendars as "Busy", "Working Elsewhere", or "Out-of-Office", etc.
- i) Employees are encouraged to use appropriate channels of communication when contacting others, with particular consideration where their hours of work may not coincide with a colleague's hours of work. This may include sending an email instead of phoning or texting a colleague outside their working hours.
- j) Employees who are excessively contacted while exercising their right to disconnect from work are encouraged to discuss the matter with their Manager/Supervisor, Director, and/or Human Resources.

6.2 Compliance

In accordance with Town policies, collective agreements and applicable legislation and policies, Managers/Supervisors, General Managers/Directors and the Human Resources Department will collaboratively work with employees to resolve issues related to disconnecting from work to ensure all employees experience an appropriate work-life balance.

REVIEW FREQUENCY

This policy will be reviewed every 4 years, at minimum, or more frequently as needed to maintain an effective and compliant disconnecting from work process.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

HR-001 Personnel Policy
Collective Agreements