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H1N1 Swine Flu COOP Exam Returns Bill of Health for Uncle Sam

*Just 32 Percent of Feds Give Agencies A's and B's on Flu Survivability –
10 Agencies Rank as Top of Class*

ALEXANDRIA, Va., May 13, 2009 – Telework ExchangeSM, a public-private partnership focused on telework in government, today announced the results of the “H1N1 – Uncle Sam’s COOP Exam” study, based on a survey of Federal employees between May 1st and 5th – when H1N1 was the top national security issue. Feds give their agencies mixed marks for Continuity of Operations (COOP) readiness associated with the H1N1 scare. The diagnosis is there is room for improvement in Federal agency continuity plans and telework is a key remedy.

The study shows that agencies need to plan ahead to support the remote workforce in order to maintain operations in a pandemic. Should H1N1 have infected the city in which Federal employees work, only 51 percent indicated that they would definitely show up for work. Significantly, if H1N1 cases were reported in their office, just 26 percent said that they would definitely show up for work.

The study shows that Federal agencies need to provide additional guidance to employees on how to respond to a potential pandemic. Forty-two percent of respondents noted that they had not received any guidance. The majority of the remaining 58 percent who did receive guidance from their agency said that most guidance focused on personal hygiene – “wash your hands” – rather than on tangible operational plans on how to continue working when you cannot come to the office.

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However, some respondents’ feedback was certainly positive. Thirty-two percent of Feds gave their agencies A and B grades on H1N1 survivability. The top 10 most prepared agencies included:

- Department of Commerce
- Department of Health and Human Services
- Department of Justice
- Department of the Navy
- Department of Transportation
- Department of Veterans Affairs
- General Services Administration
- National Aeronautical & Space Administration
- National Science Foundation
- United States Postal Service

COOP and Telework

The study underscores the strong relationship between telework and agencies’ COOP readiness. Comparing the most COOP-ready agencies from this study with Office of Personnel Management’s (OPM) statistics on percentages of eligible Feds who are teleworking further demonstrates the link between telework and COOP preparedness. At the most prepared agencies – those with A’s and B’s in this study – 16.43 percent of eligible employees telework. This compares to 7.62 percent of eligible employees teleworking across the entire Federal government. Interestingly, 76 percent of respondents who give their agencies an A on telework programs also give their agencies an A or B on COOP readiness.

Lessons Learned

Comparing the results of this study against a similar Telework Exchange study conducted during the Avian Flu scare of 2006 shows that the Federal government is moving in the right direction. In 2006, 21 percent of Feds knew that their agencies’ COOP plans included plans for a flu pandemic. That number increased to 33 percent in this H1N1 study sample. However, the OPM Pandemic Guide of 2006 points to President Bush’s Implementation Plan for the National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza, which directs every agency to develop a comprehensive preparedness plan.

“A pandemic has the potential to be a nationwide Katrina emergency,” said Cindy Auten, general manager, Telework Exchange. “The study demonstrates once again that telework is not a ‘break glass in case of emergency’ option. Agencies need to embrace telework as a standard operating procedure for it to deliver real COOP value.”

The “H1N1 – Uncle Sam’s COOP Exam” study is based on a survey of 307 Federal employees. To download the full study results, please visit www.teleworkexchange.com/H1N1.

About Telework Exchange, LLC

Telework Exchange is a public-private partnership focused on demonstrating the tangible value of telework and serving the emerging educational and communication requirements of the Federal teleworker community. The organization facilitates communication among Federal teleworkers, telework managers, and IT professionals. For more information on Telework Exchange, please visit www.teleworkexchange.com.