

## TELEPHONE MISUSE/ABUSE

Employers should formally adopt telephone use policies for both incoming and outgoing calls for employees and supervisors alike based upon the following considerations:

- The calls tie up the trunk lines coming into the company, thereby interfering with the company's ability to conduct business.
- The receiving of personal messages is time consuming.
- Neglect of job responsibilities occurs when involved in personal telephone calls.
- Abuse of telephone privileges results in costly calls paid for by the company.
- Incoming calls bring personal problems into the workplace, which causes interruptions and annoyance.
- Continuity of work is interrupted by personal phone calls.
- The telephone, when being misused, is not available for emergencies; therefore, misuse creates a safety problem.

Supervisors who take corrective action for telephone misuse should identify the misconduct simply as:

- Misuse or abuse of telephone, unauthorized use of telephone (see above items),
- Neglect of job duties during the time spent on the telephone,
- Being away from the assigned work area without authorization when telephone misuse occurred. (Attempt with documentation to show the effect of such abuse or misuse upon job performance or productivity.)

Telephone misuse or abuse should not be characterized as theft.

The company's corrective action/disciplinary action steps should be followed for telephone abuse or misuse; and if unauthorized use of the telephone for long distance, personal use is involved, the employer may demand reimbursement by the employee to the company for costs of the calls involved.

Similarly, based on the time records involved for the unauthorized, personal, long distance telephone usage, the employer may deny payment to the employee for time lost from work while the employee made the unauthorized calls. Care should be taken to absolutely ensure that the employee was scheduled at the time the calls were made, as there is no legal basis to deny payment of wages for calls made at times when the employee was not scheduled for work, even though the employee did abuse the telephone policy. It would still be appropriate to require the employee to reimburse the employer for unauthorized telephone calls charged to the employer even though the calls may have been made while the employee was not on duty.

If supervisors do not uniformly enforce telephone use policies, or if supervisors themselves misuse telephones or abuse telephone policies, such actions will mitigate similar misuse and abuse by employees.

Supervisors should insist that employees obtain approval of their supervisors before utilizing a company telephone for any reason other than job performance, company-business-related needs. All approved use of company telephones should be logged according to date, time, employee name, and supervisor who approved the use. The right of the supervisor to know the general nature of or the reason for, the requested telephone authorization is appropriate if the call is to be made on company time utilizing a company telephone.

Similarly, a log should be kept of those instances where a supervisor denies approval for use of company telephones.

Some situations which should be considered as legitimate reasons to permit supervisors and employees to utilize company telephones include:

- accidents, injuries, or other personal emergencies or tragedies,
- changes in an employee's work schedule for the convenience of the company, which will necessitate changes in starting time, leaving time, etc.,
- health problems,
- emergency "personal business" (permitting telephone use here may prevent absence),
- urgent and unavoidable family circumstances,
- making arrangements for a safe ride home.

It is not improper to deny union officials the use of company telephones on company time for the purpose of conducting "Union business" if such use is not identified as acceptable under the terms of the Agreement and so long as "Union business" is not the only reason disapproved of by supervisors.

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Proper telephone procedures should include the requirement for the caller to identify himself or herself for incoming callers who request to speak to employees and supervisors on company telephones during work periods. Proper procedures may also include a provision for receiving a message to be delivered to employees in order that they may return the calls at a time approved by the supervisor.

- \_\_\_ Telephones and telephone jacks installed in locations where they are out of sight of supervisors should be relocated to discourage telephone misuse.
- \_\_\_ Many employers find telephone misuse or abuse is often reduced when public pay telephones are provided in areas utilized by supervisors and employees during breaks, lunch.
- \_\_\_ In instances where incoming calls or messages for employees become unreasonable, steps should be taken to impress upon the employee the necessity for reducing the number of calls.