



## **RE: POLICY: RIGHT TO DISCONNECT**

### **INTENT**

The Corporation of the City of Elliot Lake understands that due to work-related pressures, the current landscape of work, or an employee's work environment or location, employees may feel obligated or choose to continue to perform their job duties outside their normal working hours. Work-related pressure and the inability to disconnect from the job can lead to stress and deterioration of mental health and overall well-being. This policy has been established to support employee wellness, minimize excessive sources of stress, and ensure that employees have the right to disconnect from their work outside their regularly scheduled hours.

### **GUIDELINES**

An employee's time outside working hours is meant for employees to recharge and spend time as they wish, and should not be used to complete work-related tasks; however, there may be a lack of separation between home and work that makes it difficult for employees to truly disconnect. Because work is more accessible, employees may end up continuing to work even after their workday is done. Using personal time to work can make an employee feel as though they are "always on" or obligated to continue working or respond to communication.

Employees who do not fully disconnect from their work at the end of the day may experience stress and other mental health issues. Stress and poor mental health are associated with many of the leading causes of disease and disability, can lead to burnout, negatively affect performance, mood, and attendance, and personal and professional relationships.

Employee health and well-being are priorities while working and away from work. The City of Elliot Lake is committed to increasing overall employee health and wellness and providing employees with a better work-life balance.

### **THE RIGHT TO DISCONNECT**

Employees have the right to disconnect from their job and any work-related tasks or communication outside of working hours without fear of reprisal.

Employees are encouraged to set clear boundaries between work and their personal lives.

The right to disconnect means that employees:

- Can and should stop performing their job duties and work-related tasks when they are not expected to work;
- Are not required to take work home with them to complete outside of regular working hours;
- Are not expected or required to respond to work-related communication outside their regular working hours, while on break, or during any paid or unpaid time off;
- Should take and use all of their scheduled breaks and time off entitlements for non-work related activities; and
- Will not face repercussion or be penalized for not communicating or continuing to work outside of their regular working hours.

Employees must also be respectful of other's right to disconnect and should not expect their co-workers to respond, communicate, or complete work when not working.

### **WORKLOAD AND PRODUCTIVITY**

The City of Elliot Lake understands that employees may want or need to work outside their normal hours to meet a time-sensitive deadline, to attend to an urgent matter, or due to unforeseen circumstances; however, employees should not regularly or frequently work outside their scheduled hours to complete or catch up on work.

Employees who cannot manage their workload during their regularly scheduled hours should meet with their direct manager to evaluate the current workload, priorities, and due dates.

Managers will work with employees to come up with a solution to ensure;

- The current workload does not result in the employee working excess hours or contribute to additional stress and burnout;
- Normal job duties can be completed during working hours; and
- Employees can remain productive and meet corporation goals and objectives.
- Working additional hours does not always equate to higher productivity. Employees can maximise their productivity during their workday by using time management tactics, such as:
  - Blocking off periods of their schedule and calendar to complete specific tasks or address communication;
  - Working with their manager to organize work in order of priority or importance;
  - Breaking down projects and tasks into manageable chunks;
  - Trying to have at least one dedicated workday per week without meetings (where possible); and
  - Setting goals to work continuously for a specified period before taking a break or responding to communication.

### **COMMUNICATION**

Employees may feel obligated to send or respond to messages when not working. The City of Elliot Lake may, on occasion, send general communication to employees when they are not working, such as on an employee's day off or scheduled vacation, but will do their best to ensure that they are not sending communication that requires an immediate response from employees. Employees are not expected to respond to any corporation communication when not at work, with the exception of unforeseen circumstances, such as an emergency.

Employees must also respect others and avoid direct communication like sending e-mails, messages (through their phone or other communication and messaging apps), or calling other employees or clients outside their regularly scheduled working hours, during breaks, or during an employee's time off, such as their regular day off or vacation time.

The City of Elliot Lake understands that it may be necessary to send communication to a group of employees, such as an entire department, or forward important information to an employee who is not working. If employees do send communications to others who are not at work, they should not expect a response until the other employee returns. If the matter is urgent or an emergency and requires an immediate response, employees must reach out to their manager.

Employees who do not reply to work-related communications outside normal working hours will not face negative effects on their employment.

Set communication boundaries by:

- Setting clear expectations for email response time;
- Setting out of office automatic replies for time away from the workplace;
- Schedule any breaks or time off in your calendar; and
- Avoiding using work e-mail for unrelated communication, such as newsletters, coupons, or personal correspondence.

### **BREAKS AND TIME OFF**

Breaks are provided in accordance with employment standards and the collective agreement and are intended to provide employees with time to recharge, and enable them to resume their regular work productively. Employees should take any scheduled breaks during their shift. Employees should take time away from their work and refrain from responding or sending communication during breaks.

The City of Elliot Lake understands the importance for its employees to have personal time off. Employees are encouraged to use their accrued paid vacation time in full every year for rest, relaxation, and personal pursuits. Employees are expected to complete any time-sensitive projects and meet any deadlines before going on vacation. If work can be attended to when the employee returns, they can resume their duties where they left off before taking vacation. Managers will work with employees to delegate job-specific duties that must be completed while the employee is on vacation to maintain workflow and productivity. Employees should not be reluctant to take vacation due to workload, unless there are limitations or restrictions because of due dates, project priority, scheduling conflict, or unforeseen circumstances that prevent an employee from taking vacation at a specific time requested.

### **OVERTIME**

Hours worked outside an employee's standard hours may lead to overtime hours. The City of Elliot Lake allows employees to work overtime, with the exception of Management Employees. Overtime may need to be requested or required in certain situations to ensure work is completed; however, employees should not work overtime unless directed by their manager. Please see the Collective Agreement for guidelines on hours of work and overtime.

### **MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT**

The City of Elliot Lake recognizes that the workplace plays a significant role in managing and supporting mental health and understands that deterioration of mental health and wellness can be triggered by excess pressures at work or at home and result in lowered work performance and harm to one's physical and mental conditions.

The City of Elliot Lake will support mental health by:

- Minimizing work-related sources of stress;
- Addressing internal factors that contribute to burnout;
- Regularly assessing workload, productivity, and expectations;
- Promoting work-life balance;
- Helping employees recognize the signs and symptoms of mental health issues;
- Having an open-door policy for communication and ensure employees are comfortable talking to their manager about mental health concerns;
- Treating mental health with the same level of importance as physical health and safety;
- Conducting risk assessments to identify workplace factors that worsen or improve mental health; and
- Providing employees with the assistance and access to resources they need to support their mental health (such as employee assistance programs, accommodations, and so on)