



## **BLUE H: CIVILIAN WELLNESS TIME-OFF CRITERION OF THE NAVY SURGEON GENERAL'S HEALTH PROMOTION AND WELLNESS AWARD**

6 June 2017

One of the criteria found in the MEDICAL and FLEET Blue H criteria sets is **“Does the command grant excused absence (59 minutes or less per event; not more than 3 hours per week; not more than 3 months in duration) to GS civilian employees to voluntarily participate in command-sponsored health, wellness and fitness programs?”**



This criterion is based on the DON Civilian Human Resources Manual, Subchapter 792.4 (Apr 2005) [https://portal.secnav.navy.mil/orgs/MRA/DONHR/OCHRHQ/Policy/CHRM792.4\\_Work%20Life%20Program.pdf](https://portal.secnav.navy.mil/orgs/MRA/DONHR/OCHRHQ/Policy/CHRM792.4_Work%20Life%20Program.pdf) which applies (only) to DON appropriated fund civilian employees, and which states “Regional Commanders, Commanders, Commanding Officers, Heads of Activities, Officers in Charge, Managers and Supervisors...(m)ay grant a limited amount of excused absence to employees who participate in command/activity sponsored health, wellness and fitness programs”...which “may include counseling, information and workshops on a wide range of safety and health issues. Sample programs include: flu shots, CPR and defibrillator trainings, smoking cessation, stress management, weight/nutrition management, back injury prevention, alcohol and drug abuse, physical fitness facilities and individual exercise programs, screenings for prostate, cervical, colorectal, and breast cancer as well as screening for sickle cell anemia, blood lead level, blood cholesterol level, immune system disorders such as HIV, and blood sugar level testing for diabetes...Educational programs may be designed to increase the knowledge and motivation of individuals to seek and maintain healthy life style behaviors and practice disease prevention activities...”.

This OCHR document also states that “Commands/Activities have the authority to utilize appropriated funds to pay the costs incurred by employees participating in agency-authorized smoking cessation programs...Smoking cessation programs should include educational materials, classroom training, individual and/or group counseling and/or pharmacological therapy (such as nicotine replacement therapy)”...“Appropriated funds may be used to purchase access for its employees to a private fitness center’s exercise facilities as part of a command/activity’s fitness program...Command/activity’s purchase of fitness club memberships for the use of employees on a continuing basis should be undertaken only when all other resources have been considered and rejected; employee use will be carefully monitored as part of a bona fide prevention program relating to health...fees for external competitive opportunities, such as registration fees for fitness events...are viewed as personal, rather than official and must be paid by employees”...“commanding officers of installations” (are granted) “discretion to determine civilian use of Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) activities to civilian employees on a space available basis.”



This OCHR document also states “**Commands/activities may officially sponsor fitness programs.** The purpose of a command/activity fitness program is to encourage employees to adopt a healthy lifestyle. A command/activity fitness program must adhere to the following guidelines:

- 1) The command/activity fitness program is officially sponsored by the activity head or commanding officer. The decision to sponsor a fitness program is at the command/activity level and is based on mission requirements. Purpose and duration of the physical fitness program must be documented in writing.
- 2) A command/activity sponsored fitness program should normally be limited (e.g. not to exceed 3 months) in duration.
- 3) An officially sponsored fitness program may include specific activities such as walking, use of base gym, stretching classes, sports day, education on safe participation in fitness events and other general recreational events.
- 4) Employee participation is voluntary and open to all employees.
- 5) Supervisors of employees participating in a fitness program will determine and control employee participation and must account for the employee’s time in the fitness program’s activity. Supervisors may revoke participation if any abuses are not corrected immediately. Excused time may be granted in increments of 59 minutes or less per absence and may not exceed 3 hours per week. Excused absences for this purpose cannot interfere with or impede the progress of the command/activity’s mission.
- 6) Continued employee participation in an exercise program upon completion of the command/activity’s officially sponsored program will be through flexible work scheduling and leave usage.

This OCHR document clarifies that “...**Individual** exercise programs are those where the program is **not command/activity sponsored** and is a personal decision of the employee. The DON generally places responsibility on employees to use **non-duty time**, including lunch periods, when participating in individual exercise programs... An excused absence should **not** be granted to allow an employee to participate in an **individual** exercise program. Some positions (i.e. firefighters) require employees to meet fitness requirements. These employees must participate in physical activities in order to help them meet job-related medical standards or physical requirements. Rather than excused absences, official time should be authorized. See Comp. Gen. No. B-218840, September 6, 1985.”



Some things to consider:

1. It may be considered by some to be a breach of the spirit of this OCHR guidance for a command to circumvent the “3 month duration” rule for a command to offer continuous, back-to-back, 3-month long “command sponsored” events.
2. The command may wish to designate their qualifying “command-sponsored” health and wellness activities in writing and provide written rules for employees and supervisors to ensure and to document full compliance with the OCHR rules.
3. Placing in writing the command’s policy of limiting participation of select individuals in “command sponsored” activities when the command’s mission precludes such.
4. Placing in writing the employees responsibilities to secure supervisory approval prior to participating in “command sponsored” activities.

NOTE - Recommended source of information about DON OCHR policy: Chief, Work Life Branch; Defense Civilian Personnel Advisory Service; (571) 372-1709.

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The Blue H - Navy Surgeon General’s Health Promotion and Wellness Award, guides, encourages and rewards the promotion of health in Navy and Marine Corps organizations. The Blue H is managed by the Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center on behalf of the Navy Surgeon General IAW BUMEDINST 6110.13A, *Naval Medical Department Health Promotion Program*.

Learn more about the Blue H at:

<http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/health-promotion/Pages/blue-h.aspx>