



Bell County Employee Handbook

Employee Version

Adopted 2009
(Revised 10.4.2021)

Bell County Commissioners' Court

Dear Bell County Employee:

This is the revised 2009 version of the Bell County Employee handbook, adopted by the Commissioners' Court. The Bell County Employee handbook is intended as a brief reference guide for your use in the event you have any employee related questions. There are new and revised policies throughout the handbook, therefore you should read this latest version to be sure you are aware of revisions and changes. The writers of the handbook cannot anticipate or address every circumstance or question that may apply to individual employees. If a situation arises, that is not addressed in this handbook please contact your department head, elected official, immediate supervisor or the human resources office. The Commissioners' Court continually reviews employee policies resulting changes on occasion. All changes take effect when passed by the Commissioners' Court.

Elected officials who serve as department heads may have different or added employee polices. A list of elected officials who have adopted the Bell County Employee Handbook are in an appendix at the end of this document. Elected officials who have adopted this handbook and the policies contained within, may at any time revoke the adoption, or add different policies by giving notice to his or her employees. If the elected official has adopted the Bell County Employee Handbook, any added department policies may not conflict with or contradict policies contained in this document. Appointed officials may have additional employee policies but no added policies may conflict with the policies contained within this document.

Bell County will issue an electronic version of the handbook via the Bell County web site, www.bellcountytexas.com to employees who have computer access. Bell County will issue printed copies of the handbook to those employees who do not have access to county computers. Please keep in mind the handbook is the property of Bell County, and you will be charged replacement costs (provided you were issued a hard copy) if you loose or damage the handbook beyond use. You must turn in the handbook when you leave employment with Bell County as part of the checkout process.

The language used in this employee handbook does not create, or constitute a contract between the County and any or all of its employees. Employment with Bell County is for no fixed or definite term, and either the employee or the County may sever the employment relationship at any time for any reason.

Sincerely,

The Bell County Commissioners' Court

Bell County Employee Handbook

Table of Contents

Section 100	General Personnel Guidelines
100	Official Employee Records
101	Employment Outside Bell County
102	Directory Information
103	Equal Employment Opportunity Employer
104	At-Will Employment
105	Voluntary Termination
106	Extended Leave Policy
107	Out Processing; COBRA Information
108	Transfers between departments
109	Employee Identification Badges
110	Employee Travel and Reimbursement updated 10.1.2021
111	Media Relations
112	Voting
113	Involvement in Political Campaigns
114	Protected Health Information – HIPAA
Section 200	Workplace Expectations; Employee Complaints
200	Ethics
201	General Work Rules and Expectations for Work
202	Employee Discipline
203	Harassing Behavior
204	Sexual Harassment
205	Reporting Harassment
206	Involuntary Discharge
207	Reasons Bell County may dismiss Employees
208	Violence in the Workplace
209	Contraband in the Workplace
210	Tobacco Use in Bell County Buildings
211	Maintaining Confidentiality
212	Searches of Personal Property
213	Dress Code and Grooming
214	Excessive Absences and Tardiness
215	Employee Complaints
	Grievance Level 1
	Grievance Level 2
	Grievance Level 3

Section 300 Pay Policies

- 300 Mandatory Direct Deposits
- 301 Pay Period
- 302 Overtime Compensation
- 303 Reporting Time Worked
- 304 Wage Garnishment
- 305 Employees on Call
- 306 Longevity Pay
- 307 Severance Pay
- 308 Payroll Deductions
- 309 Worksheet; Hours of Work

Section 400 County Funded Employee Benefits; Employee Purchased Benefits

- 400 Workers' Compensation (County Funded)
- 401 Paid Health and Dental Coverage (County Funded)
- 402 Retirees Health and/or Dental Coverage (County/Employee Funded)
- 403 Employee-Purchased Insurance (Employee Purchased)
- 404 Deferred Compensation (Employee Purchased)
- 405 Texas County District Retirement System (County/Employee Funded)

Section 500 Employee Leaves and Absences

- 500 Sick Leave and Discretionary Days
- 501 Notification of Absence
- 502 Return to Work After Illness
- 503 Medical Appointments
- 504 Family Illnesses
- 505 Sick Leave Pool
 - Eligibility, enrolling, and request process
 - Definition of catastrophic illness
 - Appeals
- 506 Bereavement Leave
- 507 Funeral Leave for Non-Family Members
- 508 Additional Bereavement Leave
- 509 Family and Medical Leave (FMLA)
- 510 Jury or Witness Duty
- 511 Military Leave
- 512 Inclement Weather Closings
- 513 Paid Holidays
 - Holiday pay
- 514 Vacations and Vacation Accrual
 - Unused vacation time
 - Pay for unused vacation
 - Break in service
- 515 Volunteer Emergency Service Leave
- 516 Breastfeeding Breaks

517 Paid Quarantine Leave for Fire Fighters, Peace Officers, Detention Officers, and
Emergency Medical Technicians.

Section 600 Safety and Security

600 Equipment Maintenance and Operation
601 Industry and Safety Code Standards
602 Protective Equipment
603 Reporting Accidents
604 Visitors in the Workplace
605 Drugs and Alcohol
606 Reporting Security Violations
607 Emergencies
Tornadoes
Fire

Section 700 County Equipment Usage

700 Computer, Network and Internet Usage
General computing policy
Electronic mail policy
Network security policy
Internet policy
Acknowledging of receiving computer use policy
701 County-Owned Vehicle Use Policy
Compliance with traffic and related laws
Alcohol and intoxication
Defensive driving
Accident reports
Transporting passengers and family members
702 Personal Use of County Owned Telephones (Not Official Business)
County issued cell phones, beeper and pagers

Bell County Employee Handbook

HANDBOOK AND PERSONNEL POLICIES: This document containing employee policies is for orientation and training purposes only and is not an employment contract. Bell County reserves the right to change or make exceptions to its policies, procedures and benefits, whether contained herein or otherwise communicated to employees, (all hereinafter referred to as policies) without advance notice.

No Bell County employee has the authority to bind Bell County to policies different from those in this handbook or to make any contract of employment. Additionally, any variation of any policy of Bell County and any contract of employment with Bell County can be made only by an elected official and must be in writing and signed by the Bell County Judge.

This handbook is the property of Bell County. This revised handbook replaces the County's previous employee handbooks.

Section 100 General Personnel Guidelines

100 Official Employee Records

Bell County will maintain all official employment related files, and when applicable, a separate medical file. Personnel and medical files are the property of Bell County and information contained within those files shall be consistent with federal, state and local government regulations. Personnel files should contain documents related only to employment. For example, applications, resumes and other application documents, W-4s, change of status forms, termination of employment forms, letters of recognition or commendation, among others. Employee medical files contain employee documents related to workers' compensation, FMLA, medical leave of absence forms, documents pertaining to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), drug screenings and results required for pre-employment physical exams, and other medical information required by applicable law.

Individual employees do not have a right of privacy in his or her personnel files. Personnel files are the property of Bell County and individual employees have no ownership interest in his personnel file. Employees wishing to view his or her personnel file may be allowed to do so on request but only in the presence of a Human Resources office staff member.

101 Employment Outside of Bell County

Your job with Bell County should be your primary job. If you have a moonlighting or second job, you must inform your supervisor of the details. The second job must not interfere with assigned overtime work.

102 Directory Information

Employees are required to promptly report any changes of name, address, telephone number, or number of eligible dependents. Such information is required by Bell County for matters such as federal withholding and insurance coverage. That information should be provided to the Payroll Department.

103 Equal Employment Opportunity Employer

All employees and job applicants are guaranteed equality of employment opportunity under state and federal law. Essentially, this means that Bell County will not discriminate against any worker or applicant based on race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, disability, or veteran status. All recruitment, selection, placement, training and layoff decisions made by Bell County supervisors or managers will be based on job-related qualifications and abilities of candidates without any illegal discrimination.

All other personnel policies and practices of Bell County, including compensation, benefits, discipline, and safety and health programs, as well as social and recreational activities, will be administered and conducted without regard to any individual's race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, disability, or veteran status. Bell County will take all necessary steps to ensure that each employee's work environment is free of unlawful discrimination or harassment based on race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, disability, or veteran status. Bell County will take all necessary steps to see that applicants and employees with known disabilities are reasonably accommodated and that all applicable federal, state and local laws regarding employment are complied with. Applicants and employees who have a disability and who need a reasonable accommodation are encouraged to notify the Human Resource Office so that Bell County can make a reasonable accommodation.

Bell County does not discriminate based on sex, unless the job requires specific gender (for example female corrections officers supervising female inmates). All references in any Bell County materials to masculine terms or pronouns such as "he" or "his" shall be read to mean the feminine equivalent such as "she" or "hers" and similarly all reference to female terms or pronouns shall be read to mean the masculine equivalent.

104 At-Will Employment

All employees of Bell County are employees *at will* and as such are free to resign from employment at anytime with or without reason. Bell County retains the same right to discharge any employee at any time with or without cause or advance notice. Nothing contained in this handbook or any other document provided to the employee is intended to be, nor should it be, construed as a contract that employment or any other benefit will be continued for any time. No Bell County official or employee shall promise or guarantee any employee employment for any period of time nor make any guarantee of salary or benefits. Any salary numbers provided to an employee in annual or monthly terms are stated for the sake of convenience or to facilitate comparisons and are not intended and do not create an employment contract for any specific period of time.

Bell County employees may be disciplined, demoted, transferred, or discharged at any time with or without notice or cause. No statements found in this handbook are intended to or will limit a supervisor's right to discipline an employee providing there is a reason. Further, supervisors administering discipline or discharging an employee are not required to follow any specific procedure or comply with any of the procedures described within this handbook, which are guidelines only.

105 Voluntary Termination (Resignations)

Employees who are resigning should provide two-week's advance notice.

106 Extended Leave Policy (Adopted 07/30/12)

Normal sick leave is limited to a maximum of the 12 weeks provided under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). Employees who desire sick leave beyond the 12 weeks provided for under the FMLA because of a disability must apply for extended leave. This application for extended leave should be made as soon as the need for such leave becomes known to the employee. Generally, the application needs to be submitted with a supporting letter from the employee's doctor at least two weeks in advance of the need for such leave. An employee's application for extended leave will be considered in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADAAA) requirements. The County will provide a reasonable accommodation as provided for under the ADAAA which may include extended leave as provided for under the ADAAA. The County will not be required to provide unduly burdensome accommodations not required by the ADAAA including extended leave if such leave is unduly burdensome.

107 Out Processing; COBRA Information, Retirement information (if applicable)

Any employee who resigns or is discharged by a department head or elected official must report to the Human Resources Office, third floor, historic court house, 101 E. Central, Belton, TX for out processing. The employee will receive COBRA information, retirement information, where applicable, and other information relating to termination of employment with Bell County. Employees resigning or discharged will have an opportunity to fill out an exit interview form or request an exit interview with the Human Resources Director.

108 Transfers between Departments

Department heads and elected officials should coordinate all approved employee transfers from one department to another with the payroll department. Because of payroll processes, the payroll department highly recommends that employee transfers occur during the first day of the pay period.

109 Employee Identification Badges

All employees in each department should wear a picture, identification badge while on duty unless excused from doing so by the employee's department head or elected official. The Human Resources Department will issue identification badges. Employees who have lost ID badges will be asked to reimburse Bell County for replacement costs.

110 Employee Travel and Reimbursement (policy updated 10.1.2021)

Bell County employees on occasion use personal vehicles to travel when performing authorized County business. The County reimburses employees who use personal vehicles for County travel for each mile driven at a rate set annually by the County. The following rules apply for mileage reimbursement:

- No travel expenses may be incurred by any employee without authorization from an elected official or department head
 - Employees or officials receiving monthly travel allowances will not be eligible for reimbursement for in-county travel
 - When two or more employees travel in the same vehicle, only one may claim mileage reimbursement.
- Employees claiming mileage reimbursement must submit a request for payment on the County's official travel form approved by the department head or elected official



Bell County Travel Policy

Examined and approved in Commissioners Court.

County Judge's Signature: _____
David Blackburn

Adopted Date: _____

Policy Effective Date: October 1, 2021

Table of Contents

Introduction/Purpose..... 2

Applicability..... 2

Types of Travel..... 2

Method of Payment..... 3

Reimbursable Travel Expenses..... 3

Event Registration..... 4

Meals..... 4

Lodging/Hotel Accommodations..... 5

County-Owned Vehicles..... 6

Personal Vehicles..... 6

Rental Cars..... 7

Common Carriers (Air, Train, Bus) 7

Ground Transportation (Taxis, Public Transportation, Buses, Shuttle Service) 8

Miscellaneous Expenses..... 8

Fiscal Year Overlap..... 8

Non-Reimbursable Expenses..... 8

Travel Advances..... 10

Attachment A - Travel Advance Form

Attachment B – Travel Reimbursement Statement

Attachment C – Per-Diem Rate Sheet- Meal

Attachment D – Mileage Log

110 BELL COUNTY TRAVEL POLICY

INTRODUCTION/ PURPOSE

The County of Bell has a fiduciary responsibility to ensure County resources are used responsibly and that employees do not incur inappropriate or excessive expenses or gain financially from the County. As such, all persons who travel on behalf of the County are fiscally responsible and accountable for all County expenditures.

The purpose of the County's travel policy is to provide guidelines for payment of authorized travel expenses in an efficient, cost-effective manner, and to enable County employees to successfully execute their travel requirements at the lowest reasonable costs, resulting in the best value for the County.

All official travel should be prudently planned so that the County's best interests are served at the most reasonable cost. Anyone traveling on County business is expected to exercise the same economy that a practical person would exercise when traveling on personal business.

Excessive costs or unjustifiable costs are not acceptable and will not be reimbursed. The employee requesting reimbursement is responsible for ensuring that his/her expense and related reimbursement request complies with all applicable policies, authorized, and supported with necessary receipts and documentation.

County officials, department heads and supervisors are accountable for the use of County funds and must verify that all travel is budgeted, and expenditures are charged to the proper account(s).

The guidelines and procedures described in this policy may not cover every possible situation. Employees should contact elected officials, department heads, supervisors or contact the Auditor's Office for clarification as needed.

APPLICABILITY

The Bell County Travel Policy, and all associated requirements, applies to all County employees, officials, and department heads, whether elected or appointed, who incur travel or business expenses while conducting official business on behalf of the County.

TYPES OF TRAVEL

1. **Overnight Business Travel** – For official county business and requires multiple days away from work. The county will reimburse rates for per-diem meals, mileage, registration, lodging and other allowable miscellaneous expenses by submitting a Travel Reimbursement Statement. Travel advances will be authorized for per-diem meals only when traveling four or more consecutive days by submitting the Travel Advance Statement.
2. **Day Business Travel** – This travel is for official county business and conducted within the hours of a normal workday. The county will reimburse for mileage and registration only.

The County will not reimburse for overnight lodging. Meals are not reimbursable as the cost of such would be considered a taxable wage.

All travel and anticipated expenses to attend events such as conferences, seminars, training sessions, meetings and workshops or any other type of event **must be approved in advance** by supervisors, department heads or elected officials and verified that funds are available within the department's budget. The County **will not** reimburse for expenses incurred without prior authorization.

Travel to be paid out of Grant Funds must be reviewed by the Auditors Office prior to travel to ensure adherence to grant guidelines.

METHOD OF PAYMENT

The County P-Card is the preferred method of payment for most travel expenses **except for meals**. All registration, conference fees, airline tickets, car rentals, and hotel accommodations should be made using the County P-Card or a PO. Employees who do not have a County P-card must use a purchase order or be reimbursed by submitting a Travel Reimbursement Statement and, if appropriate, provide documentation.

If more than one employee is traveling, one P-Card holder may book all travel for the group to his/her P-Card to expedite the travel process. This needs to be adequately documented and approved by County officials or department heads.

Per Diem for meals and other miscellaneous costs may be reimbursed to the employee. These types of costs should only be reimbursed at the completion of a trip on the Travel Reimbursement Statement.

REIMBURSABLE TRAVEL EXPENSES

All County employees who travel are individually accountable for obtaining detailed, itemized receipts and validating the expenditure except for meals in which per diem rates are used. Itemized receipts for all expenses must accompany the Travel Reimbursement Statement.

When an employee returns from a trip, they must complete the Travel Reimbursement Statement "**Attachment B**" noting the actual expenses for reimbursement. All receipts must be attached to the travel reimbursement form (scanned receipts or emails are acceptable). The form and attachments must be submitted to the Auditor's Office for reimbursement. (See your Department Head or Elected Official for form)

County officials or department heads must sign their employees Travel Reimbursement Statement certifying that travel expenses incurred were for official County business.

If a travel advance is received for per diem meals prior to traveling, then meals should be noted as "N/A" on the Travel Reimbursement Statement. Travel expenses paid by employees will only be reimbursed upon completion of the travel.

The Travel Reimbursement Statement is required to be submitted to the Auditor's Office within 30 days after the travel occurs.

EVENT REGISTRATION

The County will pay registration fees for events such as conferences, seminars, training sessions, meetings, and workshops etc. Registration fees should be paid in advance by using the County's P-Card or a purchase order.

If the employee used personal funds to pay the registration fee, then the registration receipt must be attached to the Travel Reimbursement Statement showing the attendee's name.

MEALS

Per-diem meal allowances will be allowed as a reimbursement or as an advance to County employees traveling for overnight official County business. County P-Cards are not to be used for meals.

The County will only reimburse for meals using the most current GSA Schedule, which is the maximum amount that will be reimbursed. Per-diem meal rates are provided for the employee on the Per-diem Rate Sheet "**Attachment C**" or if completing electronically the rates are located under the "Meal – Per-diem tab" on the Travel Advance Form and the Travel Reimbursement Statement. These rates will be updated each year as issued by the Federal Government (**October 1st**) and disseminated to departments by the Auditors Office. For out-of-state travel meal rates, contact the County Auditor's Office. (See your Department Head or Elected Official for form)

Day trip meal reimbursements will not be allowed for events such as but not limited to conferences, seminars, training sessions, meetings, and workshops unless the meals are included in the registration fee for the specific event.

Prior day or post day meal reimbursement will be allowed upon approval by the Elected Official, Department Head or Supervisor if the following is met:

- a. the employee is unable to leave Bell County by 7:00 a.m. and arrive prior to the start of the event; and/or
- b. the employee is unable to return to Bell County at or before 7:00 p.m. on the final day of the event.

Per-Diem Rates – Will be paid using rates based upon the Federal Government GSA rate. Per-diem is a set amount per day and is adjusted for departure (first day) and return days (last day).

Locale – Generally, the per-diem rate is based upon the lodging location. If the event is held in a higher per-diem rate area than the employees lodging, then the higher rate can be claimed. The employee must attach sufficient documentation to substantiate the location of event.

Meal Reductions – The per-diem allowance will be reduced for any meals that are provided in the event registration. Meals included in registration fees need to be annotated as

“N/A” on the Per-diem Rate Sheet. Continental breakfasts and socials, where no formal meal is served, are not considered a deduction from per diem.

The Per-Diem Rate Sheet and conference registration/agenda must be attached to the Travel Advance Form or the Travel Reimbursement Statement.

LODGING/HOTEL ACCOMMODATIONS

Employees should use the County’s P-Card to make reservations for lodging. Employees that do not have a County P-Card must use a purchase order. Lodging/hotel accommodations paid for by employees will be reimbursed by submitting the Travel Reimbursement Statement and, if appropriate, attaching documentation.

Lodging reservations should be made in advance in order to obtain the most economical rates (government, conference, and other available discount rates, etc.).

Prior night or post night lodging will be allowed upon approval by the County official or department head if the following is met:

- c. the employee is unable to leave Bell County by 7:00 a.m. and arrive prior to the start of the event; and
- d. the employee is unable to return to Bell County by driving or flying at or before 7:00 p.m. on the final day of the event.

Extra lodging nights for personal reasons will not be paid using the County P-Card and will not be reimbursed.

Only commercial lodging (hotel/motel) establishments are allowed for overnight business travel.

An original itemized hotel/motel receipt (not a summary receipt) showing payment in full must be submitted as supporting documentation for payment or reimbursement. If a P-Card was utilized, then submit the original with the P-Card weekly report. The receipt must include the name and address of the lodging establishment, the employees name, the single occupancy room rate, and a daily itemization of the lodging charges.

Lodging/Hotel parking will be reimbursed. Valet parking will only be reimbursed if it is the only option available.

Charges such as telephone, room service, paid movies, in-room mini bar snacks/beverages or any other ineligible miscellaneous charges will not be charged to the P-Card and will not be reimbursed.

Employees traveling with a spouse or guest will not charge any additional expenses for double occupancy at hotel/motel on the County P-Card.

Faxes and Internet Access charges may be allowed if approved by the County official or department head and must be documented.

COUNTY-OWNED VEHICLES

Employees traveling on County business in a County-owned vehicle are entitled to reimbursement for any out-of-pocket gas and parking expenditures but not mileage reimbursement. Original receipts must be provided for all expenses.

Employees are required to use the County Fleet Fuel card assigned to the County-owned vehicle where applicable along the traveled route. Employees can obtain a list of authorized (County fuel card) fueling stations along the traveled route by contacting the Auditors Office.

Employees are responsible for all fines related to parking or moving violations issued while traveling on County business.

PERSONAL VEHICLES

When an employee uses their personal vehicle, with the approval from County officials or department heads, they are eligible for mileage reimbursement at the rate established each year by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). **These rates are updated annually on January 1st.**

Current mileage rates will be notated on the Travel Reimbursement Statement.

To receive reimbursements for mileage, Internet GPS maps such as MapQuest, Google maps or Yahoo maps, indicating mileage must be attached to the Travel Advance Form or Travel Reimbursement Statement.

Employees must carry liability and property damage insurance for business use of his or her vehicle. The employee's personal automobile insurance is primary in the event of an accident. It is the responsibility of County employees to ensure that they have adequate automobile insurance. The County will not be responsible for costs incurred in the event of an accident or incident.

Employees are responsible for all fines related to parking or moving violations issued while traveling on County business.

Tolls paid by an employee while traveling on official County business are reimbursable.

Employees who are traveling in or around the Bell County area on County business using their personal vehicles are eligible for mileage reimbursement at the rate established by the IRS. Employees are required to keep a Mileage Log "**Attachment D**" and submit for reimbursement to the Auditor's Office monthly. (See your Department Head or Elected Official for form)

RENTAL CARS

Car rental is a reimbursable expense only when transportation by common carrier (Air, Train, Bus) cannot be utilized or is impractical. Car rentals must be approved by the County officials or department heads prior to travel.

Only one car rental will be allowed per trip. This includes trips with multiple employees going to the same event.

Car rental will be reimbursed at the compact car rate unless the need for a larger car can be justified.

Daily rental rates, taxes, surcharges, gas, and car rental insurance are all considered reimbursable expenses.

Employees are encouraged to re-fuel the rental vehicle prior to returning it to the vehicle rental company to avoid high-priced gas charges.

Vehicular accidents must be reported to the local police and the vehicle rental agency prior to leaving the scene.

Employees are responsible for all fines related to parking or moving violations issued while traveling on County business.

The original vehicle rental receipt/bill and vehicle rental agreement must be submitted as supporting documentation for payment or reimbursement.

COMMON CARRIER (AIR, TRAIN, BUS)

Reservations and ticket purchases should be made as far in advance as possible to take advantage of any available discount fares and/or government rates.

Tickets are to be booked at the most economical fare available that meets the requirement of the employee's agenda. Employees may not select tickets from a specific carrier or airport unless it is the most economical fare. First-class and business upgrades are prohibited.

Any charges incurred because of changes to an original airline reservation made prior to or during travel are subject to the approval of the Elected Official, Department Head or Supervisor.

Original receipts are required for reimbursement.

GROUND TRANSPORTATION (Taxis, Public Transportation, Buses, Shuttle Service)

Transportation to and from the airport are considered reimbursable expenses. Shuttle service or public transportation is encouraged. Employees are expected to utilize the least expensive, most practical ground transportation to destination.

Original receipts are required for reimbursement.

MISCELLANEOUS EXPENSES

For expenses where receipts are not provided, such as tips to skycaps, bellhops, etc., a written explanation is required.

Tips for meals are included in the per diem rates and are not reimbursed as a separate expense.

The County will reimburse other tips under the following guidelines:

- Doorperson \$1.00
- Bellhop/Airport Porter \$1.00 per bag
- Taxi 15%

Business related postage and shipping will be reimbursed when properly documented and approved.

Laundry expenses may be reimbursed if traveling more than seven (7) consecutive days. Itemized receipts or written documentation is required.

Airport parking will be reimbursed for the most economical parking only. Short term parking will not be allowed.

FISCAL YEAR OVERLAP

Travel that occurs in the next fiscal year will be charged to the fiscal year's funds regardless of registration date.

NON-REIMBURSABLE EXPENSES

The County will not pay for travel-related expenses for spouses, friends, or other family members.

The County P-Card is for official use only. Incurring charges for spouses, friends or other non-eligible expenses is not allowed. Personal credit cards should be used for spouse expenses or non-eligible expenses. Travel related expenses for spouses, friends or other family members of employees must not be included on the Travel Reimbursement Statement.

Vacations or personal trips in conjunction with travel for County business require special authorization from County officials or department heads, and the expenses incurred in connection with such are not reimbursable.

A County or rental vehicle shall not be used for vacation or personal trips. If an employee is combining County business and vacation, and part of the extended travel time consists of a time between the two, then per-diem and lodging for that time will not be allowed.

Below are some (but not all) examples of expenses that are not reimbursable:

- a) Alcoholic beverages
- b) Spouse, friend, or guest charges for double occupancy at hotel/motel.
- c) Valet parking (if self-parking is available)
- d) Tips and gratuities that are more than 15% for taxi, and shuttle fares.
- e) Personal phone calls from hotel/motel rooms
- f) Personal items, such as prescriptions, cosmetics, movies, golf, health club, spas, haircuts, newspapers, laundry/dry cleaning charges, etc.
- g) Loss of funds or personal belongings

- h) Lodging costs for extra day(s) on the trip for personal reasons
- i) Luxury vehicle rentals
- j) Additional charges for accommodations, meals, travel, etc., for employees not on County business who accompany the employee on an authorized County business trip.
- k) Short term airport parking
- l) Parking and/or traffic tickets for violations of laws or regulations
- m) Fines, court costs, and related expenses
- n) Deviations, for personal convenience, from the most direct and usually traveled route.
- o) Dependent care, pet boarding or house-sitting expenses while the employee is traveling.
- p) Meals for non-overnight travel
- q) Airline snacks
- r) Convenient store or grocery store purchases
- s) Baggage fees in excess of the second checked bag
- t) Baggage excess weight fees.
- u) Expenses deemed unreasonable, excessive, unsupported, or unexplained.
- v) Recreation expenses not limited to golf, exercise room charges, movies, hotel charges for movie channels, or any general forms of entertainment for employee and/or employee's guests.

Employees who make unauthorized purchases using County funds will reimburse the County for those purchases. No exceptions.

TRAVEL ADVANCES

Travel advances will be allowed for meal per-diem rates only when traveling four consecutive days or more and approved by County officials or department heads. Employees desiring a travel advance and meets the requirement of traveling four or more days should complete the Travel Advance Form "**Attachment A**". (See your Department Head or Elected Official for form)

Registration fees, lodging, mileage, and airfare will not be advanced to the employee. Employees are expected to prepay these travel expenses by using the County's P-Card or a Purchase Order. Fees for these items paid by an employee will be reimbursed by including on the Travel Reimbursement Statement and, if appropriate, attaching documentation.

Travel advance requests must be submitted to the County Auditor's Office no earlier than two weeks in advance of the travel. Travel advances must be received in the Auditors Office by noon on Wednesday for a check to be generated for pick up on Friday afternoon of the same week ahead of the following weeks travel event. Departments are responsible for making sure that all travel documents are submitted with the Travel Advance Form in sufficient time to receive the advance before travel. If the request is not received within the time specified, the employee will have to personally pay for travel expenses and submit for reimbursement upon return.

Travel advances shall not be provided to the employee more than five (5) days before actual travel begins unless the employee is taking vacation in conjunction with travel.

Travel advances are issued to the requesting employee and may not be used by any other employee. Likewise, travel advances are issued for a specific trip and may not be used for a trip different than the one listed on the original request.

Travel advances are the sole responsibility of the requesting employee and such funds should be safeguarded from loss or misuse.

In the event the trip is cancelled, travel advances must be reimbursed back to the County no later than 5 calendar days after the day of the event.

Preparation of the Travel Reimbursement Statement is the responsibility of the employee claiming reimbursement and is accountable by the County official or department head.

County officials or department heads who approve and sign employee's Travel Reimbursement Statement must ensure that the form is properly completed and has the necessary receipts attached.

111 Media Relations

Frequently, department heads and elected officials solicit news coverage of important new developments, laws, services and other need-to-know public information. To maintain accuracy and consistency, employees who receive inquiries from the news media must follow the following guidelines and procedures:

- No employee may grant an interview or make comments about County business without approval of the County Judge or the employee's elected official or department head.
- The County judge, an elected official or a department head may designate a spokesperson to handle certain types of routine inquiries and contacts with local news media or information requests.
- No one, including County officials, should make *off the record* statements to the media.

112 Voting

Bell County employees are encouraged to vote. Employees may choose to vote on early voting days or on election days for candidates of their choice. Elected officials and department heads are encouraged, but not required, to grant a reasonable amount of time off, at full pay, to employees who wish to vote during working hours.

113 Involvement in Political Campaigns

Bell County employees may not become involved in political campaigns during working hours. Employees may not use County equipment for political purposes nor will employees be required to participate in political campaigns or related activities as a condition of obtaining or retaining employment. In addition, Bell County will not discipline, discharge, or deprive any employee of employment rights for refusal to participate in such activities while off duty.

County employees, to include elected officials and department heads, will not:

- Use official authority or influence to interfere with or affect the results of any election or nomination for office;
- Coerce, attempt to coerce, command, or advise another person to pay, lend, or contribute anything of value to a party, committee, organization, agency or person for a political reason;
- Use any equipment, property or material owned by Bell County for personal political use

114 Protected Health Information - HIPAA

Access to HIPAA – protected health information – Employees who, in the course of performing his or her duties, obtain information which is protected health information are expected to treat such information with the utmost confidentiality. Such information should only be disclosed to others who are specifically authorized to have access to such information and only on a need to know basis.

The Human Resources Department has the complete policies related to protected health information and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). You may contact the Human Resources office for more information about HIPAA.

Section 200: Workplace Expectations; Employee Complaints

200 Ethics

Employees of Bell County are public servants. As such, they are expected to continually conduct themselves in an ethical and appropriate manner, which does not reflect poorly on the County. The following are examples of unethical or inappropriate behaviors, which may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination:

- Conducting county business with a firm in which a county employee or close relative of the employee has substantial ownership or interest;
- Borrowing money from customers or firms from which the County buys services, materials, equipment or supplies;
- Accepting substantial gifts or excessive entertainment from an outside organization or agency;
- Misusing privileged information or revealing confidential information or data to outsiders;
- Using one's position in Bell County and knowledge of County business for outside personal gain.

Employment in Bell County carries with it a responsibility to be continually aware of ethical conduct. Employees must refrain from taking part in or exerting influence in any transaction in which their own interests may conflict with the best interests of Bell County.

201 General Work Rules and Expectations for Work

Orderly and efficient operations of Bell County departments require that employees adhere to certain rules, expectations, and proper conduct and standards at all times. Rules and standards are necessary to protect the health and safety of all employees, to maintain uninterrupted production and to protect Bell County's goodwill and property. Employees should be familiar with and adhere to all departmental and county rules.

Bell County citizens are our *customers*. Employees are to serve Bell County citizens and anyone in need of assistance. Employees are expected to always cheerfully serve Bell County citizens, to meet his or her needs, and above all, to avoid giving any customer the *bureaucratic run-around*. As a Bell County employee, you are expected to represent the County and its elected officials and to meet any situations that arise calmly and courteously.

202 Employee Discipline

Employees may be disciplined, demoted, transferred, or discharged at any time with or without notice or cause. Nothing contained in this section on disciplinary procedure or anywhere else in this handbook limits an elected official's or department head's right to discipline or discharge an employee at any time for any reason. Further, such discipline or discharge is not required to follow any specific procedure or progression or to comply with any of the procedures set out herein. Disciplinary procedures are guidelines only and do not limit the elected official's or department head's rights. Depending on the employee's conduct Bell County may impose any or all of the following disciplinary actions in any sequence or order:

- Oral warnings – oral counseling, documented and placed in applicable employee personnel file
- Written warnings – copy placed in applicable employee personnel file

- Suspension—with or without pay; or
- Dismissal

203 Harassing Behavior

It is an expectation that employees will treat each other with respect and professionalism. Any Bell County employee found harassing another Bell County employee based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age or physical or mental disability or other protected characteristic is in violation of Bell County's policy and will be subject to disciplinary action up to and including immediate termination. Examples of harassing behavior include but are not limited to ethnic jokes, racial slurs, derogatory name-calling, or any other offensive conduct that may offend or impair an employee's ability to perform his or her job.

This policy extends to and prohibits harassment of suppliers, vendors, clients, or customers. Conversely, if the harasser is a client, vendor, supplier, customer, or any other individual, the County employee is to report the incident to his or her supervisor.

204 Sexual Harassment

It continues to be the policy of the County that sexual harassment of employees or applicants for employment in any form is unacceptable conduct which will not be tolerated.

Sexual harassment includes, but is not limited to:

- any unwelcome sexual advances, including unsolicited sexual comments
- requests for sexual favors,
- other verbal, visual or physical conduct of a sexual nature
- pressure for sexual activity
- sexist remarks about a person's body or sexual activities
- patting, pinching, or unnecessary touching

No supervisor or other employee shall threaten or insinuate, either explicitly or implicitly, that another employee's or applicant's refusal to submit to sexual advances will adversely affect that person's employment, work status evaluation, wages, advancement, assigned duties, shifts, or any other condition of employment or career development. Similarly, no employee shall promise, imply or grant any preferential treatment in connection with another employee or applicant engaging in sexual conduct.

205 Reporting Harassment

Any employee who feels that he or she is a victim of sexual harassment by any supervisor, management official, other employee, customer, client or any other person in connection with employment at the County should bring the matter to the immediate attention of their supervisor. An employee who is uncomfortable for any reason in bringing such matter to the attention of his or her supervisor, or is not satisfied after bringing the matter to the attention of his or her supervisor, should report the matter to the Human Resources Director, his or her Department Head, any County Commissioner, or the County Judge. Any questions about this policy or potential harassment should also be brought to the attention of the same persons. The County will promptly investigate all allegations of harassment and take appropriate corrective action if warranted.

Employees who observe harassment should report that occurrence or occurrences to his or her supervisor. An employee who is uncomfortable for any reason in bringing such matter to the attention of his or her supervisor, or is not satisfied after bringing the matter to the attention of his or her supervisor, should report the matter to the Human Resources Director, his or her Department Head, any County Commissioner, or the County Judge.

Any employee who is determined, after an investigation, to have engaged in sexual harassment in violation of this policy will be subject to appropriate sanctions up to and including immediate termination.

Employees are expected to cooperate with any investigation of alleged harassment. Failure to do so may lead to discipline, up to and including immediate termination.

206 Involuntary Discharges

Bell County employees may be disciplined, demoted, transferred, or discharged at any time with or without notice or cause. No statements found in this handbook are intended to or will limit a supervisor's right to discipline an employee providing there is a reason. Further, supervisors administering discipline or discharging an employee are not required to follow any specific procedure or comply with any of the procedures described within this handbook, which are guidelines only.

207 Examples of Reasons Bell County may Dismiss Employees

The following are examples of conduct, which may result in dismissal. Following are examples only and in no way limit the ability of the County to terminate employees for other reasons or no reason:

- Accepting bribes in the course of work
- Negligent or willful damage of public property
- Falsification of official documents or records
- Unauthorized copying, use of or disclosure of information restricted by law
- Insubordination
- Continual violation of safety procedures
- Theft of public property or public money
- Failure to properly perform work
- Disruptive conduct
- Attendance issues
- Other

208 Violence in the Workplace

It is a goal of Bell County to provide a safe and secure work environment for employees free of violence. Thus, acts or threats of violence by any employee against another employee or another person will not be tolerated while on duty. Employees should promptly report any such conduct or threats. Further, any employee who engages in fighting, physical attacks, assaults, or intimidation or who makes threats of physical violence or of an attack or assault will be subject to discipline, up to and including immediate termination of employment. Employees are prohibited from stealing, damaging, or destroying property, and are also prohibited from threatening to steal, damage, or destroy property of others, including County property.

209 Contraband in the Workplace

With the exception of weapons approved for law enforcement personnel and other employees lawfully approved to carry weapons, Bell County employees are not to possess weapons on County property at any time, including County-owned vehicles. While on duty, employees not affiliated with Bell County law enforcement or otherwise lawfully approved to carry firearms may not carry a weapon of any type onto County property. Examples of banned weapons include, but are not limited to, handguns, stun guns, knives, mace, pellet guns, rifles, batons, and blackjacks.

210 Tobacco Use in Bell County Buildings

In keeping with the intent to provide a safe and healthy workplace, the County prohibits employees and visitors from using tobacco products of any kind inside of any county buildings. The Commissioners' Court authorizes elected officials and department heads to establish an outside smoking area out of public view. Employees in violation of the tobacco use policy may be subject to discipline.

211 Maintaining Confidentiality

Employees shall maintain the confidentiality of information acquired in the course of his duties for the County and shall use that information for official and job-related purposes only. Further, such information shall only be disclosed and communicated on a need to know basis and in accordance with rules of the County for maintaining confidentiality. Employees should not share any confidential information unless specifically authorized to do so by a department head or elected official. Specific requirements for maintaining confidentiality may vary from department to department and from job to job. Employees are responsible for familiarizing themselves with and adhering to any policies and requirements of confidentiality established for and applying to his department.

212 Searches of Personal Property

While it is Bell County's desire not to interfere with an employee's desire for privacy, Bell County reserves the right to without permission or notices search an employee's desk, work area, locker, cabinet, vehicle, computer or other County-owned equipment or facility. Additionally, when issues of safety, security, theft, or violation of County policy occur, Bell County may request cooperation of employees in any investigation. Failure of an employee to cooperate with an investigation is grounds for discharge.

213 Dress Code and Grooming

Bell County employees are expected to dress in clothing that is in good taste, modest, neat, clean, and appropriate for his or her position and dress safely for the job. Different departments in the county have various requirements for dress. Check with the department head or elected official for more detailed information about department dress expectations

214 Excessive Absences and Tardiness

An essential function of every job and an expectation from every department head, elected official, and supervisor is that Bell County employees are absent as little as possible. Bell County expects you to consistently report for work on a daily basis and on time. Those who are excessively absent or tardy for any reason may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including discharge.

215 Employee Complaints

Employees may bring informal complaints about any work-related condition to the attention of his or her supervisor or Human Resources Director. Employees may file formal complaints only about the following: 1) demotions, 2) termination of employment, 3) improper dismissal, 4) transfer, 5) suspension from work, and 6) violations of Bell County's discrimination or harassment policies

Even though the filing of formal grievances is limited as set above, the County encourages employees to informally resolve other employment issues within the employee's department. If the problem cannot be first resolved within the department, employees are encouraged to seek the assistance of the Human Resources Director.

Grievance Procedures

- **Grievance Level 1**

An employee may file a formal grievance by submitting the grievance in writing to the employee's department head within five (5) working days of the complained of action. The department head has five (5) working days to issue a written reply to the employee and issue a copy to the Human Resources Director. If the employee feels the grievance has not been resolved satisfactorily and is not satisfied with the department head's or elected official's reply, the employee may move to level two of this procedure.

- **Grievance Level 2**

An employee may submit a grievance in written form to the Human Resources Director with a copy of the written reply from the employee's department head or elected official within five (5) working days of receiving the reply. The Human Resources Director will respond in writing to the employee within five (5) working days and provide a copy of the reply to the department, elected official, or County Judge. If the employee feels the HR Director did not resolve the grievance satisfactorily, the employee may move to level three of this procedure.

- **Grievance Level 3**

An employee may submit the grievance in written form to the County Judge, if the employee works for an appointed department head or in written form to the appropriate elected official, if the employee works for an elected official. The grievance must be submitted within five (5) working days after receiving the HR Director's reply under Level 2. The employee must attach

copies of the department head/elected official and the HR director's reply. The County Judge or Elected official will make a decision based on the written material supplied by the employee and the appointed official or may provide a hearing for the employee and/or provide a written reply and take appropriate action. The County Judge's decision is final and binding. In the event the employee works for an elected official, the elected official's decision is final and binding.

Section 300: Pay policies

300 Mandatory Direct Deposits

Direct deposit provides a number of benefits, such as avoiding lost checks, and theft or forgery. The payroll office deposits employee paychecks in the employee's account on payday. All employees are required to use direct deposit for payroll unless the payroll office approves an exemption. There are circumstances for which payment by check, rather than direct deposit is necessary or suitable. A direct deposit form must be completed and forwarded to the payroll office along with a voided check, bankcard with account and routing numbers or a letter from your bank with a account number and routing numbers.

Exceptions and Exemptions from Mandatory Direct Deposit

- An employee's first and last paycheck will not be direct deposited
- Bell County will not direct deposit the paycheck of an employee hired for less than 90 days. If Bell County continues employing the individual beyond 90 days, direct deposit is required unless the County grants an exemption.
- Employees may request a hardship exemption on the *application for exemption from payroll direct deposit* form, available in the payroll office, 3rd floor, Bell County Historic Courthouse.
- Possible exemptions from direct deposit include the employee's inability to have a bank account or the employee is unable to withdraw funds because he or she does not live near or is not employed near a bank. Bell County may consider other exemption requests based on extenuating circumstances.

301 Pay Period

Paychecks are issued on the 15th and the last day of every month. If either the 15th or the last day of the month should fall on a weekend or a holiday, payday will be the last working day prior to the normal payday. Pay period cutoff times for hours worked, vacation hours and sick leave hours are automated using the Kronos time management system schedule.

302 Overtime Compensation

Nonexempt employees as determined by the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 can either be paid at the rate of time and one-half or receive time and one-half compensatory time off for all time actually worked in excess of 40 hours/week. Salaried employees, for example, some supervisors, department heads, elected officials and others declared exempt from the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 are not eligible for overtime wage.

Supervisors may assign overtime work to meet established schedules or deadlines. Supervisors will attempt to give advance notice to employees whenever possible. However, situations

occasionally arise that do not permit advance notification. Overtime rates are applied to actual hours worked on County business and are computed as follows: time worked in excess of 40 hours in one week is paid at the rate of 1.5 of the regular hourly wage of the employee, OR supervisors may grant employees compensatory time off granting 1.5 for every hour worked in excess of 40.

303 Reporting Time Worked

All employees hired for jobs classified as non-exempt must complete accurate weekly time reports showing all time actually worked. This is a record required by regulations, and Bell County uses the time reports to calculate paychecks. At the end of each pay period, the employee and the employee's supervisor should both sign the time record.

304 Wage Garnishment

It is the policy of Bell County to comply with state law, the Child Support Enforcement Program and Title III of the Consumer Protection Act. Title III imposed federal restrictions on state garnishment laws beginning July 1970. No employer may discharge any employee because the employee's earnings have been subjected to garnishment for *any one indebtedness*, which means a single debt, regardless of the number of times garnishment proceedings are filed for collection. The Child Support Enforcement programs require that beginning January 1, 1994, employers withhold for child support orders immediately. The law allows for an exception to immediate wage withholding if the court finds good cause, or if both parents agree to another arrangement. The County will receive a notice from the state child support enforcement agency that tells when to begin to withhold, how much to withhold and where to send the money. If you have further questions regarding wage garnishment, please contact Payroll at 254-933-5117.

305 Employees on Call

Several Bell County departments (maintenance and custodial, road and bridge, and technology services) have employees who are *on call*. Personnel on call are to stay within 30 minutes of Bell County facilities while on call. Hourly employees who respond to a call are to record all time worked in response to the call. Bell County compensates employees who are on call and work above 40 hours in a workweek according to overtime pay rules

Elected officials and department heads **do not** consider *on call* as hours for which the employee will receive pay when the employee is free to engage in activities for his or her own purposes but is required only to inform the department how he or she can be reached or is required to carry a beeper or cell phone. Elected officials and department heads **do** consider *on call* hours worked when employees restrict their personal activities to the extent the employee cannot use this time effectively for his or her own purposes.

306 Longevity Pay

Full-time employees are compensated for longevity. In addition to the base salary, Bell County will pay an additional .5% per month per year of service (revised 10/2010). Longevity pay starts on the 13th month of employment with the County. Any person leaving employment in Bell County for more than 60 consecutive days will lose his or her longevity pay on returning to Bell County employment.

Occasionally, part-time employees become regular full-time employees. If a part time employee does not have a break in service and becomes full-time, his start date as a part-time employee shall be used by the County to determine the employee's eligibility for longevity pay.

307 Severance Pay

Bell County has not established a severance pay program.

308 Payroll Deductions

Deductions from employee wages shall be in accordance with applicable law. When appropriate, the Bell County payroll office will deduct money from an employee's wage in the following order: Social Security tax; federal income tax; child support, retirement (mandatory) and wage garnishment.

Employees who object to any deductions, such as deductions due to an absence, deductions for a garnishment, or a child support order are to contact the Human Resources Director. Bell County intends to comply with all applicable laws including the Fair Labor Standards Act and will promptly correct any deductions made in error or not permitted by applicable law. Employees must consent in writing to the following deductions:

- Payment of group health and/or dental insurance, life insurance, accident insurance, cancer insurance, disability policies, and lost time policies
- Contributions to a retirement plan

309 Workweek; Hours of Work

The Bell County employees are generally required to work Monday through Friday, from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, or as specified by each department.

Section 400 County Funded Employee Benefits; Employee Purchased Benefits

400 Workers' Compensation (County Funded)

Bell County maintains workers' compensation insurance for its employees. Employees are required to immediately report any on-the-job injury to his or her supervisor. Employees on leave due to a work-related injury are to advise the department head or elected official of his or her status at least once per week.

401 Paid Health and Dental Coverage (County Funded)

Bell County provides paid personal health and dental coverage to its full-time employees. Full time employees also have the option of purchasing medical and dental insurance from the health insurance provider for dependents including spouse, children, or family coverage.

402 Retirees Health and/or Dental Coverage (County/Employee Funded)

Retirees from Bell County may continue his or her medical and/or dental coverage after retirement. Bell County will pay a portion of the retiree's medical and/or dental insurance premium until he or she is eligible for Medicare benefits at age 65. The retiree is responsible for the portion of the group health insurance and/or dental premium the County does not pay. The County reserves the right to discontinue any payment for retiree health and/or dental coverage at any time because the County considers health and/or dental coverage a benefit and not a retired employee's right.

403 Employee-Purchased Insurance (Employee Purchased)

There are several life insurance plans available to full-time employees at his or her own expense.

- Life Insurance: Any contracts of life insurance are between the insurance company and the insured. Bell County is not responsible for any issues arising between employees and life insurance companies.
- Employee-Purchased Supplemental Insurance: Bell County has several insurance policies available and administered by an outside insurance company. Benefits provided by these policies include coverage for days of work missed due to illness or some other medical issue.

404 Deferred Compensation (Employee Purchased)

The deferred compensation program allows employees to defer a portion of his or her income. Deferred income will not be taxed until withdrawn, thus lowering the employee's annual taxable income and reducing the employee's annual income tax. Money set aside in deferred accounts, if not withdrawn, can supplement an employee's retirement income or be used for other purposes. Employees may sign up for deferred compensation at any time. Contact the payroll office at 933-5118 if interested. Money in accounts cannot be withdrawn completely unless the employee has retired, resigned, or has employment terminated by Bell County

405 Texas County District Retirement System (County/Employee Funded)

Bell County participates in the Texas County District Retirement System. The retirement plan is mandatory for full-time employees. The County withholds 7% of each employee's gross pay every pay period. That money is the employee's contribution to his or her retirement. At the same time, Bell County contributes to the employee's retirement at a rate which varies from year-to-year. The amount the County contributes to the employee's retirement annuity may vary from year to year.

Employees who terminate employment with Bell County before reaching retirement eligibility may withdraw the amount they contributed to the retirement plan. Employees cannot withdraw any amount contributed by the County for the employee unless the employee decides to retire and is fully eligible. Then, the employee retrieves both his or her own contribution and the County contribution through monthly retirement payments.

Section 500: Employee Leaves and Absences

500 Sick Leave and Discretionary Days

Bell County provides a generous sick leave and flexible leave benefit to all full time, regular employees. Thus, sick leave and discretionary leave from Bell County is a benefit, not a right. If a supervisor concludes that an employee is abusing his or her sick leave or discretionary leave benefits, he or she may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including discharge. Employees may take sick or discretionary leave in hourly and ¼-hour increments subject to prior approval of the employee's supervisor. The rate of accrual is 120 hours (15 days) sick leave in a calendar year. No more than 960 hours (120 days) of accrued sick and discretionary leave may be carried forward from one calendar year to the next. Bell County does not compensate employees for unused sick leave upon termination of employment or retirement.

Of the leave hours earned, an employee may, with prior approval of his or her supervisor, use up to 40 hours (five days) per year as discretionary time off to take care of personal business. The

County charges discretionary leave against your accrued sick leave. Discretionary leave is limited to three consecutive days and you may not take discretionary leave before or after holidays without department approval.

501 Notification of Absence

Regular and reliable attendance is important to the overall operation of each department. If, for any reason, an employee cannot avoid being absent or tardy, he or she shall notify his or her immediate supervisor within a reasonable time before his or her starting time. Bell County defines reasonable as soon as possible but at least one hour prior to reporting time. Different departments within the County have various notification rules. Contact the elected official or department head of your department for specific information.

502 Return to Work after Illness

A medical excuse from a medical professional is required when absent for three consecutive days. However, *department heads and elected officials at their discretion may require medical certification from a medical professional for each absence depending on the employee's past absence history.*

503 Medical Appointments

If employees have scheduled medical appointments during working hours, the employee's supervisor must approve the medical appointment absence in advance. Employees must provide documentation to his or her supervisor verifying the medical appointment. Employees should return to work the same day as the appointment, if the appointment is for less than ½ day.

504 Family Illnesses

At times, an employee's immediate family members become ill. Employees may use any unused sick or discretionary leave days to care for a spouse, child, or parent. In some instances, immediate supervisors may require documentation from a medical professional either before or after the absence.

505 Sick Leave Pool

Bell County provides an employee sick leave pool. The purpose of the pool is to provide employees access to paid medical leave in the event of a catastrophic illness, injury or temporary disability that prevents employees from reporting to work after all accrued time (vacation, sick leave, comp time, holidays earned) has been exhausted.

- **Eligibility, enrolling, and request process**

Regular, full-time employees, who have 12 months of continuous employment, are eligible to join the sick leave pool. If you wish to be eligible to use time from the sick leave pool, you must contribute a minimum of 24 hours (three days) of unused sick leave, discretionary leave or vacation days to the pool during the preceding calendar year. Those who do not contribute are not eligible to receive benefits from the pool; no exceptions. You will have an opportunity to contribute to the pool during December of each year. You may enroll in the employee sick leave pool by contacting the Human Resources or the payroll office in December of each year.

Contributing members may apply for sick leave pool days so long as the employee has joined the pool, has used all accrued leave time, sick leave, discretionary leave, compensatory time, holidays earned and vacation time. Also, to apply for days from the sick leave pool, the employee's condition must fit the County's definition of *catastrophic*. Employees may apply for additional sick leave from the pool through the Human Resources Department, 254-933-5118.

An employee committee administers the sick leave pool. The committee may grant an employee up to 90-days of leave in ten-day increments. The committee may choose to waive the ten-day increment rule and award up to 90 days, depending on the circumstances. Due to HIPAA rules, requesting employee's names are confidential and not revealed to the committee administering the sick leave pool and requesting employees may not appear in person before the committee.

- **Definition of catastrophic illness, injury, which qualifies an employee for days from the sick leave pool**

Illnesses or injuries Bell County recognizes as conditions that qualify employees for receiving days from the sick leave pool include catastrophic illnesses or injuries, which are terminal, life-threatening, or severe medical conditions or a combination of conditions affecting the mental or physical health of the employee. Examples of qualifying events include but are not limited to

- Strokes with residual paralysis or weakness
- Incapacitating heart attack or stroke
- Major surgery such as hysterectomies, mastectomies, heart bypass surgery
- Debilitating cancer
- Hepatitis
- Car wreck requiring hospitalization
- Broken hip

Examples of medical events that do not qualify include but are not limited to

- Broken limbs
- Colds and allergies
- Minor surgery with no complications such as appendectomy, tonsillectomy, day surgery
- Pregnancy with minor or no complications
- Carpal tunnel syndrome

Contributing members may not use days from the catastrophic sick leave pool to care for family members.

Appeals

A member may appeal the committee's decision in writing. If a member requests an appeal, the committee will respond to the employee's appeal in writing within ten (10) working days after receipt of the written appeal. The committee's decision is final.

506 Bereavement Leave

Bell County grants up to three (3) days leave with pay to employees to attend services in connection with the loss a member of the employee's immediate family. For purposes of this policy, immediate family means spouse, child, parent, brother, sister, aunt, uncle grandparent, or grandchild. In addition, immediate family includes any of the following of spouse of the employee: children, parent, brother, sister, grandparent, grandchild, aunt or uncle.

507 Funeral Leave for Non-Family Members

Bell County allows employees time off with pay, up to a maximum of four (4) hours, to attend the funeral of a relative or friend who is not a member of the employee's immediate family.

508 Additional Bereavement Leave

Employees may request time off for bereavement beyond the amounts set out in Policy Nos. 506 and 507. Those requests may only be granted by department heads or elected officials. If approved, the payroll office shall deduct hours from the employee's available accrued vacation, discretionary or compensatory time. In the event the employee does not have any accrued time, the department head or elected official may approve additional time off, but the time shall be unpaid.

509 Family and Medical Leave (FMLA)

Full time employees with at least 12 months of continuous employment with Bell County and who have worked at least 1,250 hours in the period immediately preceding a request for leave are eligible to take up to twelve (12) weeks of unpaid leave for various reasons. Family Medical Leave may be taken for:

1. Birth of a child;
2. Placement of a child for adoption or foster care;
3. Care of the employee's spouse, child or parent with a serious health condition; or
4. Inability of the employee to work based on a serious health condition.

Employees who must take time off to care for a covered service member with a serious illness or injury are eligible for additional leave. All employees may be required to use accrued paid leave time concurrently with time off taken under FMLA. For questions relating to eligibility for FMLA leave, please contact your department head, elected official, or the Human Resources Department at 254-933-5111 for further information.

510 Jury Duty

Serving on a jury is considered a civic duty, and Bell County encourages employees to serve. Employees are required to notify his or her immediate supervisor as soon as he receives a jury summons, a subpoena, or other witness notice. Employees will be paid at their regular rate of pay for time spent for jury service. Employees are required to report to work when released from court duty, and the court no longer requires their presence. Documentation of jury service must be provided upon the employee's return to work at the end of jury service.

511 Military Leave

Bell County grants leave to its employees for military service in accordance with all applicable state and federal regulations relating to military and uniformed service leave.

512 Inclement Weather Closings

Even in severe weather, it may be necessary for Bell County employees to report to work to ensure that proper service is available to members of the public. All employees should report to work as normal unless the County Judge, in conjunction with department heads and elected officials, determines that County offices will not open. Notices of closings and delayed openings as made by the County Judge will be communicated on local TV channels, radio stations and on Bell County's website. Notwithstanding instructions to report to work, employees should always exercise due care for their safety and should not report to work if doing so would create an unreasonable or unacceptable risk.

513 Paid Holidays

Approved paid holidays:

New Year's Day	Martin Luther King's Birthday	President's Day
Good Friday	Memorial Day	Independence Day
Labor Day	Columbus Day	Veteran's Day
Thanksgiving Days	Christmas Day	

Holiday pay

- Bell County pays its full-time employees at a regular rate of pay if the holiday falls within the employee's normal working schedule.
- To be eligible for holiday pay, an employee must work the regularly scheduled workday preceding the holiday and day following the holiday.
- Department heads and elected officials may grant exceptions to this policy at their discretion.
- Employees accrue holidays only if receiving a paycheck
- Employees who are on an unpaid leave of absence will not earn holiday pay if the holiday occurs during the leave of absence.

514 Vacations and Vacation Accrual

- New employees accrue vacation during the first calendar year of employment and are eligible to use earned vacation during the following calendar year
- For the first five (5) years of employment, employees accrue 80 hours (10 days) of vacation in each year, and those hours may be taken in the following calendar year.
After five years of employment, employees accrue 120 hours (15 days) vacation in each year, and those hours may be taken in the following calendar year.

First year accrual

First year hire date	Days Accrued (eligible to take after January 1 of new year)
If hired during October, November or December	2 days vacation accrued
If hired during July, August or September	4 days vacation accrued
If hired during April, May or June	6 days vacation accrued
If hired during January, February or March	8 days vacation accrued

- **Unused vacation time**

Unused vacation time not taken during a calendar year does not roll over and accrue for the next calendar year.

- **Pay for unused vacation**

Employees who terminate their employment with Bell County will receive pay for unused days up to 120 hours (15days if eligible).

- **Break in service**

Any employee who leaves Bell County employment for more than sixty (60) consecutive days (except military leave) will lose credit for all prior years of service for purpose of calculating accrual of vacation days.

515 Volunteer Emergency Service Leave

Any employee who is a member of an emergency service organization, (for example fire, auxiliary police, medical, ambulance, or search and rescue) must inform the department head or elected official with whom he or she works. Details regarding paid time off for volunteer emergency services are available through the employee's department head, elected official, or the Human Resources Department. Department Heads and Elected Officials may at his or her discretion grant up to five (5) paid days for volunteer emergency service providing the employee can document each event

516 Breastfeeding Breaks

In accordance with applicable law, Bell County supports working mothers who desire to breastfeed their babies. Bell County will allow nursing mothers employed by Bell County whatever time is needed each day to express breast milk. If the mother does this during her normal breaks, then the break time shall be paid time. If the mother does not use her break time or if additional time is needed, then such additional time as is necessary shall be provided each day but such time shall be unpaid time for hourly employees. The mother will be given a private location sheltered from view where the mother will be uninterrupted by work requirements. The location, which shall not be a bathroom, shall be determined on a case by case basis. Bell County will not allow any retaliation against any mother for requesting or using this break.

517 Paid Quarantine Leave for Fire Fighters, Peace Officers, Detention Officers, and Emergency Medical Technicians.



Bell County

Policy # 517 Paid Quarantine Leave for Fire Fighters, Peace Officers, Detention Officers, and Emergency Medical Technicians

Examined and approved in Commissioners Court

County Judge's Signature: _____
David Blackburn

Adopted Date: _____

Effective Date: June 15, 2021

517 Paid Quarantine Leave for Fire Fighters, Peace Officers, Detention Officers, and Emergency Medical Technicians

In accordance with HB 2073 from the 87th Legislature, Section 180.008, Texas Local Government Code, as amended, effective June 15, 2021, Bell County shall provide paid quarantine leave for employees who hold the positions of fire fighters, peace officers, detention officers, and emergency medical technicians employed by Bell County and ordered to quarantine or isolate due to a possible or known exposure to a communicable disease while on duty.

Under this policy an eligible employee is defined as:

"Detention officer" means an individual appointed or employed by a county as a county jailer or other individual responsible for the care and custody of individuals incarcerated in a county jail. We also recognize employees who serve in the Juvenile Detention facility as a detention officer as it relates to this policy.

"Emergency medical technician" means an individual who is certified as an emergency medical technician under Chapter 773, Health and Safety Code; and employed by the county for that role.

"Fire fighter" means a paid employee of a municipal fire department or emergency services district who holds a position that requires substantial knowledge of firefighting; has met the requirements for certification by the Texas Commission on Fire Protection under Chapter 419, Government Code; and performs a function listed in Section 143.003(4)(A).

"Health authority" has the meaning assigned by Section 121.021, Health and Safety Code.

"Peace officer" means an individual described by Article 2.12, Code of Criminal Procedure, who is elected for, employed by, or appointed by the county.

Eligible employees who are on paid quarantine leave shall receive all employment benefits and compensation, including leave accrual, retirement, and health benefits for the duration of the leave; and, if applicable, shall be reimbursed for reasonable costs related to the quarantine, including lodging, medical, and transportation.

Quarantine leave can only be ordered by the employee's supervisor or the county's health authority. A medical note from any medical professional other than the Bell County Health District Health authority does not entitle an employee to leave under this policy.

Supervisors ordering quarantine or isolation leave shall follow the protocols established by the Bell County Health District "BCHD". A copy of the current protocols is attached to this policy. These protocols are subject to change and any updates, changes, or corrections to any quarantine or isolation protocol for any communicable disease shall be implemented as soon as they are provided to Bell County and shall become an addendum to this policy. Any Supervisor needing assistance in interpreting or discussing a specific case should reach out to Bell County Human Resource

Director or BCHD. Supervisors will be responsible for following contact tracing guidelines as outlined in the BCHD protocol and notify any affected employees immediately.

A communicable disease is defined as an infectious disease (such as cholera, hepatitis, influenza, malaria, measles, or tuberculosis) that is transmissible by contact with infected individuals or their bodily discharges or fluids (such as respiratory droplets, blood, or semen), by contact with contaminated surfaces or objects, by ingestion of contaminated food or water, or by direct or indirect contact with disease vectors (such as mosquitoes, fleas, or mice).

Supervisors ordering quarantine or isolation leave shall notify Payroll and Human Resources by completing the attached form to ensure compliance with other applicable policies and/or laws.

This policy is not intended to serve as medical advice, nor does it restrict an employee's right to seek and follow medical attention for any communicable disease as they deem appropriate.

September 29, 2021

BCPHD Guidelines for Isolation and Quarantine for Employees in Case of Exposure to Highly Contagious Reportable Diseases

Definitions:

Close Contacts & Exposures: Individuals who were within 6 feet of someone with the virus for a cumulative total of 15 minutes (or more) over a 24-hour period, regardless of wearing a mask. Being in an enclosed space e.g., office, classroom, or lounge for a prolonged period even if greater than 6 feet apart if the infected person is symptomatic may be considered a close contact without a barrier such as door, glass, plexiglass, or any other device to prevent spreading of bodily fluids.

Isolation: Separation of persons who have a contagious disease to help prevent spread of the disease.

Quarantine: Separation of persons who have been exposed to, but not diagnosed with, a contagious disease to see if they develop symptoms or a positive test. Time in quarantine depends on the disease in question and is intended to prevent someone who may become or is infected but not yet symptomatic from spreading the disease to others.

Fully Vaccinated: Refers to a person who is at least 2 weeks past the 2nd injection of either Pfizer or Moderna vaccines for COVID-19, or 2 weeks past the 1st injection of the Johnson and Johnson COVID-19 vaccine.

Please contact the health department if you have questions about whether someone should be considered a close contact.

Diseases that may require quarantine or isolation include but are not limited to:

- 1) Sars-CoV-2 (COVID-19) infection, or other highly contagious coronavirus infections e.g., MERS
- 2) Measles
- 3) Diphtheria
- 4) Active Tuberculosis
- 5) Influenza (depending on strain, e.g., H1N1 or other pandemic potential strains)
- 6) Viral hemorrhagic fevers, e.g., Ebola

The period of isolation and/or quarantine varies depending on the disease. This guide will focus on COVID-19 and Influenza. For other diseases, contact the health department for guidance.

Contact Tracing:

Procedure whereby anyone who has tested positive for a reportable disease e.g., COVID-19 is contacted to determine who they have been in close contact with during the time frame 3 days prior to becoming symptomatic or having a positive test, until 10 days after same. This is generally conducted by the health department but can also be facilitated by the employer/ supervisor by

obtaining the names of any other employees in the office that might have been in close contact with the infected employee. Those close contacts should be provided with the information on quarantining and testing provided in the flow chart.

Confidentiality is paramount, and individuals are not required but strongly encouraged to notify officials of any suspected close contacts.

COVID-19 Procedures:

- 1) All employees who are confirmed or suspected to have COVID-19 must report to their supervisor immediately. In addition, anyone who knows or suspects that they have been in close contact with a known or suspected case should also report.
- 2) It is important to determine if the exposure is Low Risk or High Risk, or a Household Contact. Please contact the health department if assistance is needed in making the determination.
- 3) Determine the employee's vaccination status if possible. If they are unwilling to disclose, must treat as if unvaccinated.
- 4) Supervisor will advise employee according to the attached Flow Chart for specific actions.

Quarantine and Isolation Procedures for Asymptomatic Employees Exposed to COVID-19

Notes on Quarantine:

Considering the increased prevalence AND contagiousness of the Delta variant, it is strongly recommended that all individuals with a close contact exposure quarantine at home for 10 days. For those who are determined to be low risk, and non-household contacts, exceptions can be made. Critical, essential personnel may continue to work, but must follow the guidelines as outlined on the flowchart including always wearing a facemask and maintaining social distancing.

Fully vaccinated employees do not need to quarantine unless they develop symptoms. At that time, they should leave work and not return until receiving a negative test. Employees who have had a lab documented case of COVID-19 in the preceding 3 months also do not need to quarantine.

Return to Work:

Please see the attached flowchart for determining when employees infected with COVID-19 may return to work.

Procedures for Seasonal Influenza

Seasonal influenza is a highly contagious disease spread primarily through respiratory secretions. For seasonal influenza, no quarantine of exposed persons or contact tracing is required. If a more contagious and severe strain of influenza is detected in the community or state, more stringent guidelines may be necessary including quarantine and contact tracing.

All employees should be encouraged to get an influenza vaccine every fall. Persons with known or suspected influenza should not be allowed to return to the workplace for 5-7 days after the onset of symptoms or diagnosis is made. They should be fever free without the use of fever reducing medicines for at least 24 hours prior to RTW. All shared contact surfaces e.g. keyboards, phones, desks, doorknobs, etc. where the infected employee worked should be cleaned with a basic disinfectant to prevent further spread.

Testing and Isolation Procedures for Employees With COVID-19 Symptoms 9.12.21

**Symptomatic employee
(Report to supervisor)
Employee should be tested using Bell County provided rapid test**

Positive Result

- **You may choose to get a confirmation PCR test
Remain home in isolation until all of the following are met:**
- 10 days since symptoms first appeared **and**
 - 24 hours with no fever without the use of fever-reducing medications **and**
 - Other symptoms of COVID-19 are improving

Negative Result

- 1) May return to work when symptoms have resolved or significantly improved
- 2) If symptoms not improving or are worsening, get a PCR COVID test or call your doctor
- 3) If you have loss of taste or smell, get a PCR test
- 4) Wear mask until symptoms resolved

High-Risk Individuals:

- If you are a high-risk individual, call your doctor immediately. **** see Asymptomatic flowchart for a list of who is high risk**
- If you develop fever, shortness of breath, chest pain, or weakness, go to an Emergency Room or Urgent Care Center immediately.

General Population:

- If you are in generally good health and have mild symptoms, stay home and take care of yourself like you would for a cold or the flu.
- If symptoms worsen, call your doctor.

All Populations: If you develop any of the following, Call 911 immediately:

- Trouble breathing
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest
- New confusion
- Inability to wake or stay awake
- Pale, gray, or blue-colored skin, lips, or nail beds, depending on skin tone

For more information: <https://dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus/default.aspx#ifsick>

Testing and Isolation Procedures for Asymptomatic Employees Exposed to COVID-19 Rev. 9.29.21

Fully vaccinated employees may RTW unless develop symptoms

Low Risk

- 1) Infected person AND Exposed person were wearing a mask
- 2) > 6 feet apart, and
- 3) infected person without cough, sneezing.



- 1) Report to supervisor
- 2) Self-monitor for symptoms for 14 days.
- 3) Get COVID-19 test if develop symptoms



- 1) **Recommend quarantine at home for 10 days.**
- 2) If essential personnel, may continue to work
- 3) **MUST** wear facemask at all times for 14 days after exposure
- 4) Maintain social distancing at work
- 5) If develop symptoms, must leave work immediately & be tested. If negative PCR test, may RTW. If negative antigen test, must confirm with PCR test before returning to work.
- 6) If not tested, must remain in isolation for 10 days from onset of symptoms.
- 7) If positive, refer to RTW policy for positive COVID-19 persons

High Risk

- 1) Infected or exposed person not wearing a mask or separated by barrier to prevent spreading of bodily fluids.
- 2) Infected person had cough or sneezing
- 3) were < 6 feet apart for > 15 minutes cumulative over 24 hrs
- 4) Exposure was a household contact* (not qualified for this leave)
- 5) Exposed person is unvaccinated



Non-Household exposure

- 1) Self- monitor for symptoms for 14 days
- 2) Get COVID-19 test 5-7 days after first exposure, or if develop symptoms follow chart below.



Tests: For asymptomatic persons, rapid molecular or PCR tests are preferred. A negative rapid antigen test does not rule out COVID-19 infection.

**HB2073 Supervisor or Health Authority ordered Quarantine or Isolation Leave
for possible or known exposure while on duty.**

Employee Name: _____ Division: _____

Is the exposed employee vaccinated? Yes No

If yes, and asymptomatic - employee does not need to isolate or quarantine.

Quarantine or Isolation leave: (following BCHD protocol)

Date began: _____ Date to return: _____

Communicable Disease: _____ COVID Influenza (not seasonal)

Authorized by: _____ (Supervisor)

_____ (Public Health Authority – documentation)

For purposes of the required contact tracing, this employee has indicated that they were in close contact with the following fellow employees within 3 days of becoming symptomatic or testing positive, until 10 days after the same. See BCHD protocols for definition of close contact.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Supervisor Signature

Date

Provide a copy of any documentation provided by the employee. Return this completed form and documentation to Payroll and Bell County Human Resources.

Section 600 Safety and Security

600 Equipment Maintenance and Operation

It is the employee's responsibility to check equipment to ensure its proper operation as well as to report promptly any maintenance needed. It is also the employee's responsibility to follow established procedures and rules as required by each department.

601 Industry and Safety Code Standards

Employees must comply with all County and industry safety standards:

- Bell County prohibits reckless or careless driving and operation of County vehicles and equipment
- Every employee will keep his or her work area(s) clean and move all scrap, trash and other clutter to a designated location
- Employees who violate safety regulations may receive a disciplinary warning, suspension with or without pay or termination of employment, depending on the seriousness of the violation. Employees are expected to report any hazardous conditions, work procedures or other unsafe situations to his or her immediate supervisor.
- Employees who do not have on the protective gear required of them should not begin work
- Employees who fail to dress appropriately or wear necessary protective equipment are in violation of County policy, which may result in discipline or termination of employment.

602 Protective Equipment

Different departments may require employees to use protective equipment, which includes but is not limited to masks, gloves, goggles, and safety shields. Employees required to wear safety or protective equipment should notify his or her supervisor if any required equipment is not available.

603 Reporting Accidents

Employees must report all accidents or injuries immediately, regardless of severity, to a supervisor, department head, elected official, the Human Resources office, or the County Auditor's office. Failure to promptly report an accident is a violation of Bell County policy and may result in disciplinary action.

Employees **driving County-owned vehicles** must report any vehicular accident to the police and to a supervisor before leaving the scene of the accident, except when leaving for necessary emergency medical treatment.

604 Visitors in the Workplace

Each department has formal or informal rules relating to visitors in work areas. Bell County defines a visitor as a person who is not a customer or employee on duty in that department at the time of the visit, but one who visits in the employee work or break areas. It is the responsibility of the supervisor or department head or elected official to make certain that visitors in the department, whether employees or not, are authorized to be there. Employees are to notify a supervisor, department head or elected official if a person(s) is in a work area normally reserved for employees only. In case of doubt, the supervisor should ask visitors for identification

605 Drugs and Alcohol

To help ensure a safe, healthy, and productive drug-free work environment for the employees of Bell County and others on County property, to protect County property and assets, to maintain a favorable public image, and to ensure efficient operations, the County has adopted a policy on drugs, alcohol, and other prohibited items.

It is the policy of the County to provide a drug-free work environment that is both safe for our employees, as well as others having business with the County or are on County property and conducive to efficient and productive work standards. This policy restricts employees from reporting to work under the influence of alcohol, illegal drugs, or any prescription or over-the-counter drugs, which may, in any way, impair the functioning of an employee.

606 Reporting Security Violations

County officials cannot handle security issues and violations constructively unless they are aware of the issues. Employees are encouraged to report security-related incidents so that County officials can take appropriate action in a timely manner. To report security violations, contact your department head, elected official or immediate supervisor.

607 Emergencies

Tornados or violent weather

In the event of a tornado or other violent weather, employees are urged to remain indoors. If employees are in a multi-story building, he or she should gather at the center of the first floor or basement (when available), avoiding windows. When warning sirens sound, take shelter immediately and wait until the storm passes.

Fire

Each department in the County should have someone appointed as building fire warden. In multi-storied buildings, there should be at least one person designated on each floor. In the event of a fire, it is the fire warden's responsibility to instruct employees to follow exit procedures established for each building. Employees are not to use elevators in multi-storied buildings in the event of a fire. Department heads and elected officials should designate one or more employees to assist handicapped employees in a fire evacuation. Once outside, employees should gather in a pre-designated spot for roll call.

Section 700 County equipment usage

700 Computers, Network, and Internet Usage

Bell County computers and computer systems, including e-mail and internet access, is the property of Bell County and is being provided exclusively for work-related purposes. All use of Bell County computers, e-mail, internet access and systems is provided subject to Bell County rules, regulation and review. Bell County does not maintain these rights for the purpose of unduly intruding into communications or activities of employees, but does so in order to protect Bell County, its property and its interests and those of its employees. Use of Bell County's computer systems, including e-mail and internet access is subject to the following guidelines:

1. Employees shall take all reasonable steps and precautions to ensure the security and integrity of the County's computer system(s) and all information contained therein. For these reasons, employees are prohibited from, without specific authorization, downloading items or installing items on Bell County computers, equipment or devices. Also, employees should take reasonable steps to safeguard and protect passwords and access codes, including, employees should never share his or her password with others. Employees shall be responsible for all actions taken using his or passwords or access information.
2. All material maintained on the County Computers or obtained or sent through the County e-mail system and the access to the Internet provided by the County is subject to being reviewed by the County, and employees should not maintain any information on County computers or receive or send e-mail messages or other materials which they do not want reviewed.
3. It is not intended that incidental personal use of the computers, the e-mail system and the access to the Internet provided by the County is to be entirely prohibited. However, use of County Computers, the County e-mail system or internet access by an employee for personal purposes must not interfere with the employee's job or distract others. For that reason, the County reserves the right to instruct any or all employees to discontinue all personal use of the County computers, the e-mail system and internet access.
4. Employees are strictly prohibited from receiving or sending e-mail messages or other materials and/or maintaining files on any County computer of a harassing, intimidating, offensive or discriminatory nature. Such conduct, or any other conduct in violation of this policy, may result in immediate dismissal or other disciplinary measures. E-mail messages and all other Internet and computer use is subject to the County's other policies including sexual harassment and harassment generally.
5. Bell County is responsible for securing its network and computing system in a reasonable and economically feasible manner against unauthorized access and/or abuse, while making them accessible for authorized and legitimate users. Responsibility includes informing users of expected standards of conduct and punitive measures for non-compliance. Any attempt to violate the provisions of Bell County's computer, network and internet usage policy will result in disciplinary action through temporary revocation of user accounts, regardless of the success or failure of the attempt. The users of the network are responsible for respecting and adhering to local, state, federal and international law. Any attempt to break those laws using the network may result in litigation against the offender by the proper authorities. If such an event should occur, Bell County will fully comply with the authorities to provide any information necessary for the litigation process.

General computing policy

- Once an employee receives a user ID to access the network and computer systems on the network, he or she is responsible for all actions taken while using that user ID
- Bell County prohibits use of County owned computers for commercial purposes or personal gain.

Electronic mail policy

Whenever employees send electronic mail, the employee's name and user ID are included in each mail message. Employees are responsible for all electronic mail originating from the employee's user ID.

Network security policy

As users of the network, employees may access other networks and/or the computer systems attached to those networks. Therefore:

- Bell County prohibits using systems and/or networks in attempts to gain unauthorized access to remote systems
- Bell County prohibits using systems and/or networks to connect to other systems
- Bell County prohibits copying of system files
- Bell County prohibits copying of copyrighted materials, such as third-party software, without the express written permission of the owner or proper license
- All employees need to take steps to avoid any operations which introduce or create a high risk of introducing viruses or disruptive and destructive programs into the County's network or into external networks.

Internet policy

Internet access is provided to employees as a tool to make job performance easier and timelier.

- Employees are prohibited from displaying or accessing any sexually explicit documents or websites. The act is considered a violation of the sexual harassment policy
- Each employee using the Internet facilities of the County shall identify her/himself honestly, accurately and completely
- Employees with Internet access may not use County Internet facilities to download entertainment software or games, or to play games against opponents over the Internet.
- An Internet firewall has been installed to assure the safety and security of the County's networks. Any employee who attempts to disable, defeat, or circumvent any County security facility will be subject to immediate dismissal.
- Employees are not to use County computers to operate a business or to earn money from another entity.

Acknowledgment of receiving computer use policy

All employees with a computer user ID when signing an acknowledgement of receiving and having read this employee handbook and the computer use handbook are agreeing to County rules about Internet usage.

701 County-Owned Vehicles

To ensure safe operation of Bell County-owned vehicles, employees who drive Bell County vehicles are to adhere to the following policies and usage rules. Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.

Compliance with traffic and related laws

All employees are expected to operate Bell County vehicles in a courteous and reasonable manner with due regard for all applicable law and safety considerations , All employees driving County-owned vehicles and equipment will use seat belts, shoulder harnesses, or other safety devices. Vehicle drivers are responsible for advising passengers of the need to use the seat belt and shoulder harnesses. Bell County requires drivers of County vehicles to be physically and mentally capable of operating any County owned vehicle or County equipment when required to do so.

Alcohol and intoxication

Employees may not operate a County-owned vehicle within eight hours of consuming any alcohol. Employees taking a prescription or over-the-counter medication, which may affect their ability to drive, will not drive. Employees may never take illegal drugs and operate a vehicle. Bell County will immediately discharge any employee who violates this policy.

Defensive driving training

Each new employee will successfully complete an on-line defensive driving course prior to receiving authorization to operate a County vehicle. Current employees must successfully complete the four-hour, on-line defensive driving course every two years to maintain driving privileges of County-owned vehicles.

Accident reports

County vehicle drivers involved in an accident must fully cooperate with any investigation by authorized personnel into an investigation of the accident. Any employee who drives a County vehicle and who is arrested or charged with a motor vehicle offense that results in suspension or revocation of the employee's driver's license, must notify his or supervisor immediately or as soon as possible, but in no case later than 24 hours after the accident occurs. Conviction for such an offense may be grounds for loss of county vehicle driving privileges and/or further disciplinary action.

Transporting passengers and family members

Authorized drivers of Bell County vehicles may not transport any persons not specifically authorized to be in the vehicle and who are not engaged in official duties or business for the County. Due to insurance policy restrictions, authorized county vehicle drivers may not transport family members in a county owned vehicle.

702 Personal Use of County Owned Telephones (Not Official Business)

The following rules apply for employee use of County-owned telephones and equipment:

- Employees may never call 900 numbers
- Employees may not use the County phone system to make harassing calls
- Personal calls may be made or received by employees but must be limited and must not interfere with the employee's official duties

- Personal calls resulting in charges to the County are not allowed, except in a bona fide emergency and with authorization of the department head or elected official.

County issued cell phones, beeper, and pagers

Bell County provides cell phones, beepers, and pagers to designated employees for conducting County business efficiently and effectively. Bell County may discipline employees for using those devices in manner that is not consistent with Bell County business or for any use or purpose, which is improper. Rules which should be followed and/or uses which are improper include but are limited to the following:

- County employees authorized to drive a County owned vehicle are encouraged not to use cell phones while driving. If an employee receives or has a need to make a call while driving a county owned vehicle, the employee should stop the vehicle in a safe area to send or receive phone calls. Bell County prohibits any use of written messaging, including text-messaging while driving.
- Employees are not to use beepers, pagers, or cell phones for any illegal activity, including harassment

Elected officials and department heads should remind his or her employees that all County-paid devices (computers, phones, etc.) are provided to employees for official business and any information sent or contained on them is subject to have to be produced under the Open Records Act.