



**DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY  
POLICY AND PROCEDURES**

**SUBJECT: RESPONSE TO INCOMING  
CORRESPONDENCE [LETTERS,  
FAXES, GROUPWISE, AND  
ELECTRONIC MAIL (E-MAIL)],  
TELEPHONE CALLS, AND  
USE OF THE VOICE MAIL SYSTEM**

**Number: 01-008**

**Date: October 29, 1999**

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**ISSUE:**

To ensure a timely response to communications with the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) in order to provide good customer service.

**DEFINITIONS:**

None

**POLICY:**

Since the primary purpose of the DEQ in carrying out its responsibility for protecting our environment is service to the people of Michigan, all employees shall provide timely responses to telephone calls, incoming letters, GroupWise, and E-mail, in accordance with the following procedures.

All staff may have voice mail, subject to division/office chief approval, as long as an actual person is available when the caller presses 0, or another number is provided. No division or office with a receptionist main line shall have voice mail operating during normal working hours (8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.). Divisions and offices with more than one clerical position are expected to cover the telephones during the lunch hour. Offices having one clerical position may use voice mail during the lunch period. Main lines in district and field offices managed by DEQ shall be handled per the direction from the Field Operations District Supervisor. Voice mail is encouraged on a main receptionist telephone after hours and on weekends.

**PROCEDURE A: Responding to Incoming Correspondence**

**Responsibility**

**Action**

DEQ Supervisor or  
Employee, as appropriate

1. Incoming Correspondence (received via mail or fax)
  - a. Written responses to correspondence shall be assigned due dates. Responses shall be prepared or signed, as necessary, by the appropriate person within the assigned due date or the due date established under statute or rule. If

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more information is necessary or extenuating circumstances do not allow a response by the due date, a request for an extension of the due date explaining the delay shall be made to the assigning supervisor.

Correspondence not requiring extensive research/review, or the review by several individuals, shall normally be responded to and signed by the appropriate person within ten working days of receiving the incoming correspondence by the DEQ. If it appears there will be a delay due to the person being on vacation, etc., an interim response or telephone call shall be made by the person acting in their capacity or their supervisor explaining the delay and the expected response date.

Correspondence requiring extensive research, or the review by several individuals, shall normally be responded to and signed by the appropriate person within 20 working days of receipt. An interim response should be made if the response will take longer or the party may not be aware how long their request will take.

- b. If the issue in a letter can be addressed by telephone or E-mail, completely satisfying the person's request, a return letter is not necessary—if agreed to verbally by the requester. Document on the original letter or on a transmittal that it was handled by telephone and that the requester agreed verbally that no further written response was necessary.

**PROCEDURE B: Responding to GroupWise/E-Mail Messages, and Maintaining GroupWise Calendars**

**Responsibility**

**Action**

DEQ Supervisor or Employee, as appropriate

1. Responses to GroupWise/E-mail messages shall be handled as outlined in Procedure A above, or an E-mail response shall be made within two working days, as appropriate.
2. Each staff person shall implement their extended absence rule in their GroupWise when absent from the office for more than one working day. Please refer to DEQ Policy 02-001
3. GroupWise calendars shall be maintained by all staff and available to be viewed by other individuals as directed by their immediate supervisor.

**PROCEDURE C: Responding to Telephone or Voice Mail Messages**

**Responsibility**

**Action**

DEQ Supervisor  
or Employee,  
as appropriate

1. Telephone Calls (see Attachment A for guidance on telephone etiquette.)
2. Voice Mail/Telephone Messages
  - a. Update voice mail greetings each working day, unless a standard message has been approved for your work unit, indicating the date and the anticipated schedule for that day, particularly when you do not intend to return calls the same day. If the person is away from the office (planned leave, sick, annual, comp, or work), the message shall indicate the time the person will be gone (hours or days) and advise the caller to leave a message or press "0" for immediate assistance, if this option is available in your division/office. If the "0" option is not available, leave another number.
  - b. Telephone messages, including voice mail messages, shall receive a return telephone call. Telephone calls shall be returned within two working days of receiving the telephone message, or during the designated hours you are available for telephone calls.

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Approved: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Attachment A**

### **SUGGESTED GUIDANCE ON TELEPHONE ETIQUETTE**

Since the primary purpose of the DEQ in carrying out its responsibility for protecting our environment is service to the people of Michigan, we need to be responsive to telephone calls.

Following are some tips you may want to use as guidance:

1. Smile before you pick up the phone. You can hear a smile.
2. Phone courtesy begins with how you answer. You may start with a phrase like "Good morning," followed by your department name and your own. Then stop. People remember the last thing you say. If the caller hears your name, you'll get their name that much faster, and that speeds rapport.
3. We are customers to each other. Treat in-house calls as you would outside calls.
4. Transfer the situation along with the call. Try to advise all parties of who is on the phone and what their need is.
5. Use the caller's name within the conversation.
6. Keep your sense of humor; everybody likes to laugh.
7. Routine calls are only routine to you. It's the caller's first time. Don't be desensitized.
8. Rude angry callers? Don't argue. Don't accuse. You'll never win. Acknowledge their feelings. Proceed to help.
9. Outgoing calls? Use your name and company first. Then ask for your party.
10. Return all calls as appropriate or have them returned on your behalf.
11. Don't be too busy to be helpful.

### **Using Voice Mail**

#### **On Your Machine:**

- ⇒ Update your personal greeting daily and give the date(s). Callers feel more comfortable leaving a message when your message conveys your current status. Are you in? Are you out? Will you be in an all-day meeting?
- ⇒ Record an extended absence greeting. If you will be away from the office on business or on vacation and not checking messages, let callers know and tell them how to reach someone else for assistance.
- ⇒ Your greeting should be short and to the point. The elements of a good voice mail greeting are: your name, day of the week, press 0 for assistance or call the alternative phone number given, your schedule, and when callers may expect a return call. Remember to state the name and extension number of a co-worker who can provide assistance during your extended absence.
- ⇒ Check your voice mail regularly, especially if your greeting tells callers that you'll get back with them within a certain time frame. When you don't retrieve your messages, your mailbox will fill up. Anyone trying to leave a message after that will be told that your mailbox is full.
- ⇒ Answer your telephone when you are at your desk, unless alternative procedures have been approved for your work area.
- ⇒ Return calls as soon as possible.

- ⇒ When you know you will be away from your desk for an extended period, press the Send All Calls button if that option is available, or program your phones so callers will go directly into voice mail rather than listening to several rings first.

### **On Their Machine:**

- ⇒ Don't just ask for a return call. Tell the party you are calling what the purpose of your call is.
- ⇒ If your call is urgent or you need assistance immediately, press 0 (keep in mind that option is not always available in every office).
- ⇒ Keep your message to the point. Tell the person you are calling when it is convenient to call you back. When requesting information, leave your name, full address, telephone number, or fax number.
- ⇒ If you would rather leave a voice message instead of a message with a third party, but are not offered the option, ask.
- ⇒ When leaving your name and phone number, speak slower to ensure the receiver can understand and write down your name and number without having to replay the entire message again.