

Customer Service Communications Guidelines

Effective October 1, 2013

Purpose To establish Customer Service Communications expectations for the Department of Natural Resources (ODNR).

Authority Governor's Directive

Reference Office of Human Resources

Resource Office of Human Resources

1. STATEMENT OF POLICY

The goal of this policy is to provide the best possible service to customers both, internal and external. In support of this goal, the department has adopted the following customer service vision statement:

"ODNR employees will embrace opportunities to provide unparalleled service in our roles representing ODNR. We will be gracious and treat internal and external customers with dignity and respect."

2. IMPLEMENTATION

- A. Division chiefs shall be responsible for ensuring that the customer service communications policy is implemented.
- B. Work plans for all employees will include an expectation of good customer service.
- C. All departmental communications shall be conducted in a professional and courteous manner, responsive to the needs of the internal and/or external customer.
- D. It is expected that all ODNR employees shall adopt the communication behaviors outlined in the attached guidelines.
- E. The attached guidelines are not meant to be all- inclusive and additional behaviors, which support the goal of providing good customer service, ~~should~~ will be encouraged and supported by the department.
- F. With supervisory approval modification of these guidelines are permitted when operations dictate. The overall goal is to ensure that good customer service habits are practiced at all ODNR facilities.

3. CUSTOMER SERVICE POLICY FOR THE TELEPHONE

All telephone calls shall be answered promptly and in a professional and courteous manner in accordance with the ODNR guidelines for responding to telephone calls.

- A. Guidelines for Telephone Calls
 - i. Answering the telephone is every employee's responsibility throughout ODNR. As a general rule, phones should be answered within three rings. It is imperative for our agency to be communicative and accessible.
 - ii. When answering the phone, use a friendly, professional manner. Our greeting is the first impression we give our guests. Speak with a warm, welcoming tone. Identify yourself and your office by: ODNR, your division and your name. Imagine you are the caller, and answer the phone in the way that you would want to be treated as a customer.

Here are sample greetings to use when answering office lines:

- *"Good Morning. ODNR, Office of Communications, this is Jane. How may I help you?"*
 - *"Hello. ODNR, Division of Oil and Gas. Jane speaking. May I help you?"*
 - *"Good Morning. ODNR, Division of Soil and Water Resources, this is Jane. May I help you?"*
 - *Good Morning, ODNR, Division of Ohio State Parks. This is Jim, how may I assist you?"*
 - *"Hello, Jim is away from his desk at the moment, may I take your name and number and have him return your call when he returns?"*
- iii. Sometimes callers are unintentionally, or for a multitude of reasons intentionally less than courteous in their request or communication. They may interrupt and be rude. We should remain calm, friendly, empathetic and cooperative. Prioritize listening. Listen well. Be an active listener. Keep an open mind and make sure you understand what the caller needs or is requesting. Clarify if necessary. Do not hesitate to ask the caller questions to understand the goal or intent of the caller. Take notes if necessary.
- iv. Transfer calls as appropriate, but do not transfer a person unnecessarily. Explain to the caller briefly if you are unable to assist him or her and let the caller know you would like to transfer them. Have the caller's approval before transferring the caller to the appropriate person. Whenever possible, give the name of the person you are transferring the caller to as well as the person's telephone number.
- v. If you need to search for the proper person, get the caller's contact information so you may get back with them.
- vi. Always be sure to follow through on a commitment. If you make a promise to follow up or to find someone else to assist with a guest request, ensure the loop is closed.

Here are sample responses to use:

- *"Ms. Smith, I am sorry you are having a difficult time finding the information on dangerous wild animals. I am not the best person to answer this question for you. Susie in Wildlife will be able to answer your question. May I transfer you to her? Here is her number in case you need to speak to her again. Thank you for calling."*
- *"Ms. Smith, I am sorry you are having difficulty finding the times of the Scenic River Stream Quality Monitoring training you wish to attend. However, I am not the best person to answer this question for you, and unfortunately, I do not know who the best person is at the moment. May I get your name and number and find this information for you and give you a call back? Either I or someone else will follow up with you by the end of the day."*

B. Putting Callers "On Hold"

- i. Phone calls should never be answered with an immediate request for the caller to be placed on hold. Always ask the caller first if he or she minds holding and wait for his or her reply. When you initially put a caller on hold, never leave him or her on hold for more than 30 seconds.

Here is a sample greeting to use in this type of situation:

- *"ODNR, Office of Communications. May I ask you to hold and I will be right back with you? Thank you."*
- ii. When getting back with the caller on hold, always thank the caller for his or her patience. If you need to research information for the caller's inquiry, give him or her the option to either hold or explain you will get back with the caller when you have the information. If the caller chooses to remain on hold, two minutes on hold is the maximum amount of time that should occur without

returning to the caller for updates. If the caller prefers that you call him or her back, indicate the timeframe in which the caller may expect your call. Always thank the caller for waiting.

Here are samples:

- *"Thank you for waiting." or "I really appreciate your patience, Ms. Smith."*
- *"I need to check on that information for you. Would it be ok if I place you on hold for a few minutes or would you prefer I call you back?"*

C. Transferring Calls

- i. Callers should not be transferred directly to a voice mailbox without first asking the caller if that's ok. Give the caller the correct telephone number and the name of the person on the other line. Briefly explain to the caller why this other person is more suitable to answer this question or request.

Here is a sample response:

- *"The person you need to speak with is Jim, and he is not in his office right now. I am happy to transfer you to his voice mail so you may leave him a message if that works for you. Let me give you his phone number so you will have it."*
- ii. If the call is for someone else and you find that the person being called is not available, DO NOT put a call through directly to a voice mailbox without first talking to the caller and asking if that is what he or she wants to do. The caller may wish to talk to a different ODNR employee.

Here is a sample response:

- *"Jane Doe isn't in her office right now, but I'll be glad to transfer you to her voice mailbox or I am happy to take a message."*

D. TTY Calls

TTY calls will be handled through the Ohio Relay Service. The Ohio Relay Service (ORS) provides full telephone accessibility to people who are deaf, deaf-blind, hard-of-hearing or speech-disabled. Specially trained Communication Assistants (CA's) process relay calls and stay on the line to relay conversations electronically, over a Text Telephone (TTY) or, in some cases, verbally to hearing parties. ORS is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, with no restrictions on the number of calls placed or on their length.

4. CUSTOMER SERVICE POLICY FOR VOICE MAIL

Voice mail greetings must be professional, current and updated when appropriate. Greetings should indicate: name, position within ODNR, frequency with which messages will be checked and a provision for contacting someone in person. Voice mail shall be checked frequently during business hours, and calls shall be returned promptly. Voice mail shall be used in accordance with the voice mail guidelines.

Guidelines for Voice Mail

- i. Voice mail is a valuable tool if used correctly. This may be the caller's first and last impression of ODNR so it is imperative to give proper attention to messages.
- ii. The ODNR voice mail policy is designed to ensure that callers receive prompt and quality customer service. Instead of getting a busy signal or no answer, the caller may leave a message in voice mail.

A. Greetings

- i. The greeting for your voice mail should be current and updated as appropriate. It should let callers when you are going to be out of the office and unable to return phone calls. Let callers know when you will return calls and always give them an option of someone else they may contact in your absence.
- ii. Greetings should indicate your name and provide any relevant information you would like if you were the caller. An option for reaching a live person during business hours should be included.
- iii. Speak clearly and make your greetings friendly but professional.

Here are some sample personal greetings:

- *"This is Jane, ODNR Division of Geological Survey. If you do not wish to leave a message, dial "O" for assistance. Today is Aug. 29. I am away from my desk this morning, but I will be checking my messages this afternoon and I will get back to you. Please leave your name, number and a brief description of what you need so I may help you when I call you back."*
- *"This is Jane, ODNR Division of Wildlife. I'll be out of the office until Sept. 3. If you would like to leave a message, I will be happy to return your call when I return. If you need immediate assistance, please call John Smith at extension 243 and he will be glad to help you."*
- *"This is Jane with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Human Resources. You may dial "O" if you prefer not to leave a voice mail message. Today is August 29th. I will be in a series of meetings for most of the day, but I will check messages and return phone calls between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. Please leave your name, number and details."*

B. Messages

- i. Your voice mailbox should be checked frequently and should never be full. We are responsible for checking messages during business hours and changing the greeting as needed.
- ii. Always return phone calls in a timely manner. If a message requires a lengthy follow-up but you are unable to immediately handle it, return the call to let him or her know that you received the message and will call back once you have the requested information.
- iii. Let other staff members know when you will be out of the office, especially for extended periods of time. This will prevent staff members from transferring a caller to your voice mail.

Internal Use of the Voice Mail System

Be sure to include all relevant information in reference to the message so a timely and accurate return call may be made.

5. CUSTOMER SERVICE POLICY FOR WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Communication in written form will be in a professional and courteous manner to both internal and external customers. All correspondence shall be done in accordance with ODNR guidelines for written communication.

Guidelines for Written Communication

- A. Written communication should provide appropriate information while the ODNR employee is accountable for the quality of service that is provided.

- B. All written communication should be written in a professional format with the standard style, font and size used by the division or department protocol. All communication should be proofread carefully, not only for spelling and punctuation, but also for consistency and accuracy.
- C. ODNR letterhead with division should be used as appropriate. Correspondence should include the following: date, recipient's complete name and address, salutation, the response in the body of the letter, the complimentary closing, typed signature, and the "enclosure" or "attachment" notation and "copy - cc:" notation (if applicable). The final paragraph of the letter should include a person's name and telephone number to call if additional information is needed or if the recipient has more questions.
- D. Memoranda should include the following: date, recipient's name, sender's name and the subject in the heading; as well as the response in the body of the memorandum.

6. CUSTOMER SERVICE POLICY FOR EMAIL

Communication via email will be conducted in a professional and courteous manner. The email will be clear, informative and timely. All emails shall be written in accordance with the ODNR guidelines for communicating via e-mail.

- A. Guidelines for Email
 - i. ODNR email policy is designed to ensure that all email messages to both internal and external customers are handled appropriately and that ODNR employees are accountable for the quality of services provided.
 - ii. Email communication should occur in a professional manner. Never put anything in an email message that would be viewed as offensive or inappropriate for the business environment. Remember that as ODNR employees all information contained in the email message is considered public information.
 - iii. Email should give complete and clear information. A letter format with a salutation and a complimentary closing should always be used. Always check for spelling, punctuation and formatting errors prior to sending an email message. Care should also be taken to ensure that all responses provide the appropriate information to the customer by checking for consistency and accuracy.

Here is a sample:

- *"Ms. Brown, I received your email message dated Nov. 5. You had questions regarding grant opportunities. If you have additional questions, please contact Sue Smith, division of Forestry 614-265-0000 or feel free to contact me, Lynn Jones, at 614- 265-1000. Thank you."*
- iv. Your email should be checked frequently. We are responsible to check email as often as we check our voice mail. Read email carefully and respond in a timely manner.
- v. If you do not have an immediate answer or the email may require a lengthier follow-up than normal, acknowledge receipt of the email message, but note that you need additional time to research and respond.
- vi. If the email message sent directly to you requires a response from someone else, acknowledge that you have received the email message and note that you are going to forward it to the appropriate person to handle the request. Include the person's name and email address in your email response. Always include a closing sentence in your email message, giving them options to contact you if they need additional assistance.

Here is a sample e-mail response:

- *"Thank you for your e-mail regarding the reopening of Burr Oak Lodge. Please let me know if you have any questions or if I can be of further assistance to you."*

B. Email "Out of Office"

- i. If you plan to be away from your office longer than a normal timeframe, your email should reflect that schedule.
- ii. If you do not want to leave too many details on your email, simply leave the automated reply that you are away from your office at the moment.

Here is a sample message:

- *"I will be out of my office for vacation from July 1-7, but I look forward to following up with you when I return on July 8. If you need assistance before my return, please contact Sue Smith at sue.smith@dnr.state.oh.us, or call her at 614- 265-1212."*

C. Confidential Email Correspondence

- i. If you should receive an email inquiry that would require a response that could contain confidential information or if you need to attach documentation that is confidential, you should first respond to the email message with a disclaimer statement. This statement would give the sender an option to have the information sent to them by regular mail through the U.S. Postal Service. The statement should read as follows:

"This message and any response to it may constitute a public record and thus may be publicly available to anyone who requests it."

- ii. If you need to put something or attach documentation in an email message that could be viewed as highly confidential and sensitive, then you have a disclaimer statement in the email message. The disclaimer statement would read as follows:

"The information contained in this email message may include privileged and confidential information that is intended for the addressee only. If the reader of this message is not the intended recipient, you are duly notified that any dissemination, distribution or copy of this communication is strictly prohibited. If you have received this email communication in error, please return to the sender immediately."

D. Web-Based Inquiries/Web-Based Email Messages

E-mail designated for Web-based inquiries should be set up to automatically generate a response that acknowledges receipt of the email by indicating the sender should receive a reply to his or her inquiry soon.

Here is an example of a Web-based email:

"The Ohio Department of Natural Resources is received your email through the ODNR website. Your comments and/or questions are important to us. Be assured that you will receive a response to your inquiry as soon as possible. Thanks for contacting us and have a good day."

7. IN-PERSON CUSTOMER SERVICE POLICY

Communication in person will be executed in a professional and courteous manner to both internal and external customers. All correspondence shall be done in accordance with ODNR guidelines for written communication.

Guidelines for In-Person Interaction

- A. ODNR employees will give attention to our personal presentation in our role: good posture, eye contact and a smile. When we greet our guests we will be accessible and eager to offer assistance.
- B. When engaged by an internal or external customer:
 - We will show our dedication by verbal and non-verbal cues.
 - We will use common courtesy, using please and thank you.
 - We will make eye contact when a guest or team member is speaking.
 - We will be aware of our facial expressions.
 - We will greet internal and external guests, with sincere interest and genuine respect.
 - We will be prompt with keeping commitments and respecting the schedules of others
 - We will use self-control and good judgment in difficult situations.
 - We will ask for help as necessary.
 - We will be empathetic among our team and with our customers.
 - We will express an attitude of "friendliness" and be nice.