

Telecommuting: some choose work at home rather than office

United Press International

WEST LEBANON, N.H. —Lloyd Kvam moved from New York to get out of the city. Later he left his office job to work behind a computer at home—and make more money.

Kvam, a data processing consultant, works in an office below the kitchen in his split-level home. He does most of his work there with an Apple computer for clients as far away as California.

Kvam is among a growing number of people known as telecommuters, who have been able to leave traditional office settings by virtue of the powers of the microcomputer.

"Being on my own was by and large a matter of location," said Kvam, whose wife and two young daughters are often around when he works.

Dave Rochat, another transient from greater New York, works at home in nearby Chelsea, Vt., managing a Washington-based money market fund.

Rochat had spent about three

hours a day commuting from his New Jersey home to a New York brokerage firm before he moved to his 75-acre farm four years ago.

"I've got four kids and a wife and wanted a change in lifestyle. We kind of knew what we wanted," said Rochat, who keeps an office over a nearby funeral home.

A number of large companies, including Digital Equipment Corp. and Southern New England Telephone, recently paid Electronic Services Unlimited in New York to study the effects and future of telecommuting. The survey looked at various programs and the jobs of about 1,000 telecommuters.

The companies with successful telecommuting programs spent time developing a solid plan and made sure a good manager was supervising the right people, said Marcia M. Kelly, president of Electronic Services.

"Obviously there are barriers and disadvantages that have to be thought out carefully," she said.

"The thing people are most concerned with are the personnel issues."

Those issues can become complicated with telecommuters, determining what is a sick day or a day off when someone goes to the computer for an hour one morning.

Mike Lawson, a management information systems specialist at Boston University, wonders about legal issues. For example, is an employee covered by workers compensation if he's injured at home during the day? Aetna Life and Casualty Co. in Hartford, Conn., has allowed 16 programmers to do part of their work at home for about two years, but doesn't have a defined policy to deal with the personnel issues.

David Leclair, one of the programmers, said no problems have come up at Aetna—where the telecommuting plan started as a convenience to everyone involved.

"The work we did required major hunks of computer processing and it made it easier to do it at night (when

the system isn't being heavily used). It saved us a lot of time," he said.

Leclair will work at home about 12 hours in a typical week, and says he wouldn't want to be away from an office environment all the time.

"It would be very, very difficult to work at home all the time. I can't see doing it five days a week," he said.

Kelly agrees the mix of work at home and in the office is best for most people. "We suggest people not work at home 100 percent of the time," she said.

Leclair initially had doubts telecommuting was for him at all. He was worried that domestic distractions would be a problem.

"At first it was, until finally I sat down with the family and said this is the story: When I log on to the system, I belong to Aetna just like I'm 30 miles away at work," he said.

Everyone agrees telecommuting isn't for all people, but technical improvements continue to make it easier for those who want to give it a try.

EPA's dumping process questioned

United Press International

HARLINGEN — A congressman and an ecologist claim the Environmental Protection Agency botched the recent emergency dumping of a pesticide in the Gulf of Mexico.

But an EPA official called the dumping "the safest way to handle a very bad situation."

Rep. Kika De la Garza, D-Texas, said he is not convinced the 7,000 canisters of Brazilian-manufactured aluminum phosphide pellets would not damage the offshore environment.

And Sue Ann Fruge of the Gulf Coast Coalition for Public Health warned that some of the canisters might float ashore and endanger Texans.

The EPA contends the chemical, used to kill insects in stored grains, simply evaporated and is no longer dangerous.

EPA spokesman Roger Meacham said the situation became an emergency after an explosion killed a forklift operator unloading aluminum phosphide from a Brazilian ship on July 27 at the Port of Houston.

The Coast Guard later discovered that the batch of pesticide, which was stored in a nitrogen-cooled van, had begun heating up and destabilizing, causing a risk of explosion, Meacham said.

He said the only alternative was to risk transporting the substance over land. The chemical becomes poisonous phosphine gas when it contacts air or water.

De la Garza said the emergency disposal operation "began to resemble a carnival show in its clumsiness."

De la Garza, however, said the emergency disposal operation "began to resemble a carnival show in its clumsiness" because initially the canisters containing the pellets simply were unplugged and tossed into the Gulf.

"After sinking several hundred feet, the chemical began exploding

in contact with the sea water, but the gas trapped in each bottle forced them back to the surface where the canister bobbed up and down on the waves. The Coast Guard issued rifles to sharpshooters to blast each canister before it drifted dangerously away," he said.

After discovering the canisters were not sinking, the Coast Guard "switched disposal methods," De la Garza said.

"They began emptying each canister upside down into the water as they should have done in the first place. The remaining canisters of pellets, representing about 10 tons of aluminum phosphide, were disposed in this manner. ... Nothing like good old 'trial and error' methodology for a chemical thought too dangerous to keep on land."

Meacham emphatically denied Monday that the Coast Guard used rifles to sink the canisters, saying each receptacle found still floating was collected and chopped with a fire ax to sink it. But the EPA spokesman telephoned UPI today to say he subsequently found out some of the canisters were shot. "Kika De

la Garza was right," Meacham said.

Meacham said his agency was so sure that the potentially dangerous pesticide was disposed of safely that it plans no follow-up studies to determine after-effects, if any, of the dumping 110 miles south of Galveston on Aug. 7-8.

Meacham said the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's "worst case scenario," devised by "some pretty good scientific minds" prior to the dumping, concluded "there could be some short-lived destruction of marine life, but it appears that didn't happen."

The EPA spokesman also discounted Fruge's fear that some of the 3-pound canisters may have escaped the Coast Guard and could wash ashore.

"The chance of any of the canisters reaching shore are almost nil, but if any of them do, the material would be totally dispersed and dissipated," Meacham said.

De la Garza said scientists have told him there has been very little research on offshore dumping.

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