



Office of Inspector General

U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission

The Office of Inspector General's Survey on the Transition to Mandatory Fulltime Telework

February 9, 2021

Report 21-O-03

Vision Statement

We are agents of positive change striving for continuous improvements in our agency's management and program operations, as well as within the Office of Inspector General.

Statement of Principles

We will:

Work with the Commission and the Congress to improve program management.

Maximize the positive impact and ensure the independence and objectivity of our audits, investigations, and other reviews.

Use our investigations and other reviews to increase government integrity and recommend improved systems to prevent fraud, waste, and abuse.

Be innovative, question existing procedures, and suggest improvements.

Build relationships with program managers based on a shared commitment to improving program operations and effectiveness.

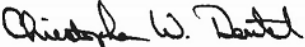
Strive to continually improve the quality and usefulness of our products.

Work together to address government-wide issues.



February 9, 2021

TO: Robert S. Adler, Acting Chairman
Elliot F. Kaye, Commissioner
Dana Baiocco, Commissioner
Peter A. Feldman, Commissioner

FROM: Christopher W. Dentel, Inspector General 

SUBJECT: Results of the OIG Survey on the Transition to Mandatory Fulltime Telework

I am pleased to present the results of the OIG survey on the management of the agency's transition to mandatory fulltime telework (MFT). The survey provides good news for agency management, as overall, staff feels that the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) management effectively accomplished the transition to MFT last March. Staff generally had positive views on communications from management regarding the transition and information concerning COVID-19.

We also asked about the quality of Information Technology Help Desk support and once again staff had generally positive views. Many staff had to use teleconferencing tools and indicated that two tools, Microsoft Teams and Zoom, are the easiest to use and provide the best audio and video quality.

Finally, we asked employees and supervisors how they feel about productivity during MFT and nearly everyone agreed that they were either as productive or more productive. Supervisors gained experience in managing teleworkers during MFT. As a result of events during the last few months, almost everyone indicated an interest in increased telework options going forward.

We plan to follow-up this survey with a survey on employee views related to their return to their primary work location.

I want to thank CPSC staff for participating in this survey and look forward to learning what concerns they have as CPSC plans its return to normal operations.

Contents

Background	2
Results in Brief	2
Communication from Agency Management	3
Experiences with the IT Help Desk	3
Videoconferencing	5
Productivity and Supervision	6
Opinions about Telework	8
Telework Positives and Challenges	9
Future Telework	9
Scope, Objective and Methodology	11
APPENDIX A: Additional Survey Questions	12

Background

On Monday, March 16, 2020, staff at the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) entered an unprecedented work environment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the prior weekend, the Office of Management and Budget issued Memorandum 20-15 ordering all federal agencies to allow maximum telework flexibilities for all telework eligible employees and to offer this option to other employees to the extent their work can be telework enabled. During the summer of 2020, it became clear that mandatory fulltime telework would continue for the foreseeable future. Therefore, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) decided it was appropriate to survey CPSC staff about concerns and positive experiences regarding:

- amount and types of communication from management
- the information technology (IT) Help Desk
- videoconferencing options
- productivity and supervision during mandatory fulltime telework
- future of telework

This survey was sent to 539 unique email addresses and 318 people responded during the survey window of September 17-25, 2020. We asked all respondents to tell us where they work.

Table 1. CPSC Employees by Location and Response Rate

	Number of Email Addresses	Responses	
		Respondents by Location	Response Rate
Headquarters	338	197	58.3
Lab (5RP)	78	54	69.2
Field	123	67	54.5
Total	539	318	59.0

Source: OIG analysis of CPSC data and response information

Additionally, we asked respondents whether they were supervisors in order to direct them to a subset of questions regarding supervisory experiences and views during mandatory fulltime telework; 51 individuals stated that they were supervisors. These 51 supervisors represent 56 percent of employees identified by the CPSC as supervisors at the time of the survey.

Results in Brief

Overall, employees have a positive view of mandatory fulltime telework and the agency's management of the transition. As of the time of the survey, they report feeling that they are getting the right amount of information from CPSC management. They express positive views on the quality and timeliness of the IT Help Desk's support. Almost everyone has become

experienced in using videoconferencing platforms to collaborate between and within offices. Most employees feel that they are either as productive, or more productive, since moving to mandatory fulltime telework and supervisors agree. There has been a shift in attitudes in favor of the CPSC providing more telework opportunities in the future. This appears to have been driven by employees and supervisors gaining experience with telework and seeing few, if any, drawbacks.

Communication from Agency Management

Employees feel that they are receiving the right amount of information from the Acting Chairman, the Executive Director, and the Office of Human Resource Management (EXRM).

How would you rate quality of information from the following agency offices while you have been on mandatory fulltime telework?

	Acting Chairman	Executive Director	EXRM
Right amount of information	85.20%	86.70%	68.0%
Not enough information	14.80%	13.30%	30.8%
Too much information	0.00%	0.00%	1.2%

How would you rate the frequency of communication from the following agency offices while you have been on mandatory fulltime telework?

	Acting Chairman	Executive Director	EXRM
Right frequency	84.80%	90.10%	73.7%
Not enough frequency	15.20%	9.90%	25.9%
Too frequent	0.00%	0.00%	0.4%

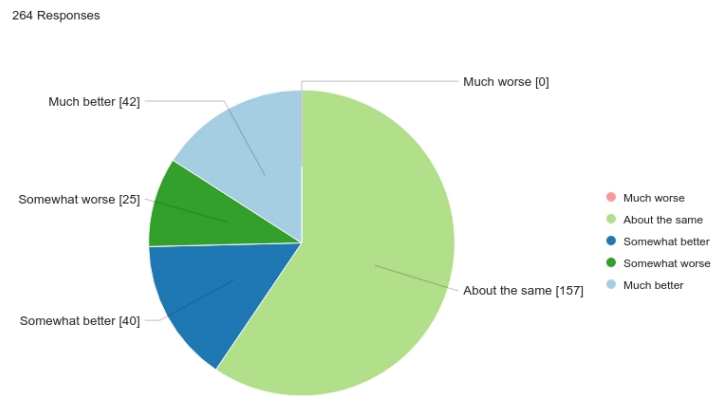
Experiences with the IT Help Desk

Employees are satisfied with the timeliness and quality of the assistance they have received from the IT Help Desk.

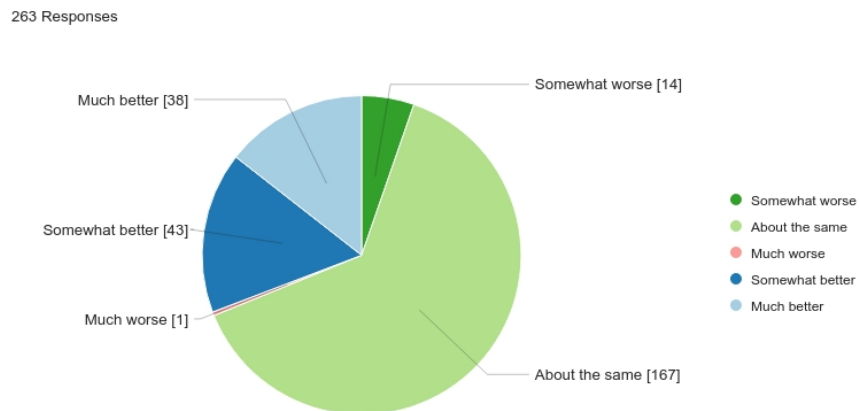
Have you contacted the IT Help Desk for assistance while on mandatory fulltime telework? If so, was the IT Help Desk able to provide you the assistance you needed?

Since moving to mandatory fulltime telework, 267 employees have requested assistance from the IT Help Desk and of those 84 percent said the IT Help Desk was able to resolve their problem.

How would you rate the timeliness of the IT Help Desk response during mandatory fulltime telework as opposed to before mandatory fulltime telework?



How would you rate the quality of the IT Help Desk response during mandatory fulltime telework as opposed to before mandatory fulltime telework?



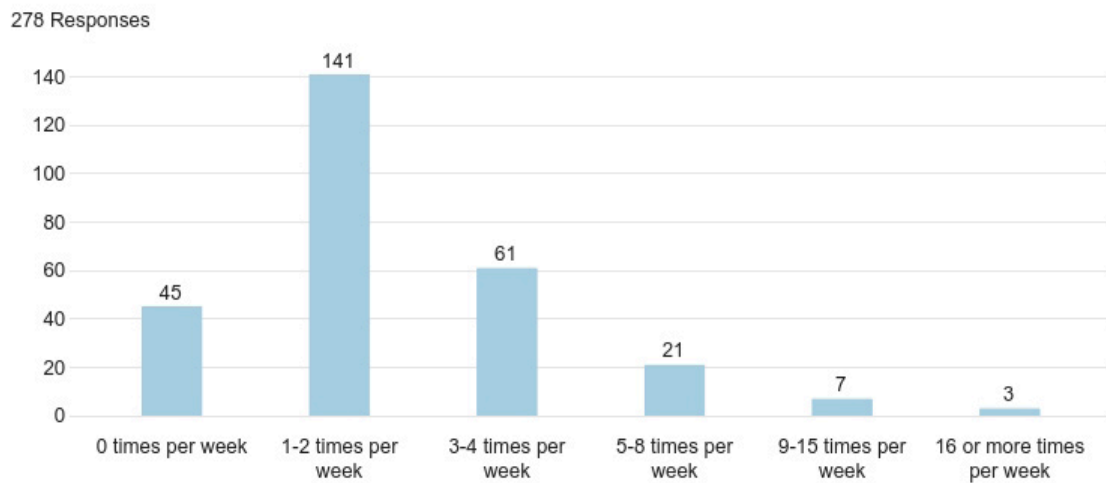
The top five reasons for contacting the IT Help Desk were:

- Network connectivity
- Accessibility/login issues
- Application/software issues
- Conversion to Windows 10
- Hardware/equipment issues

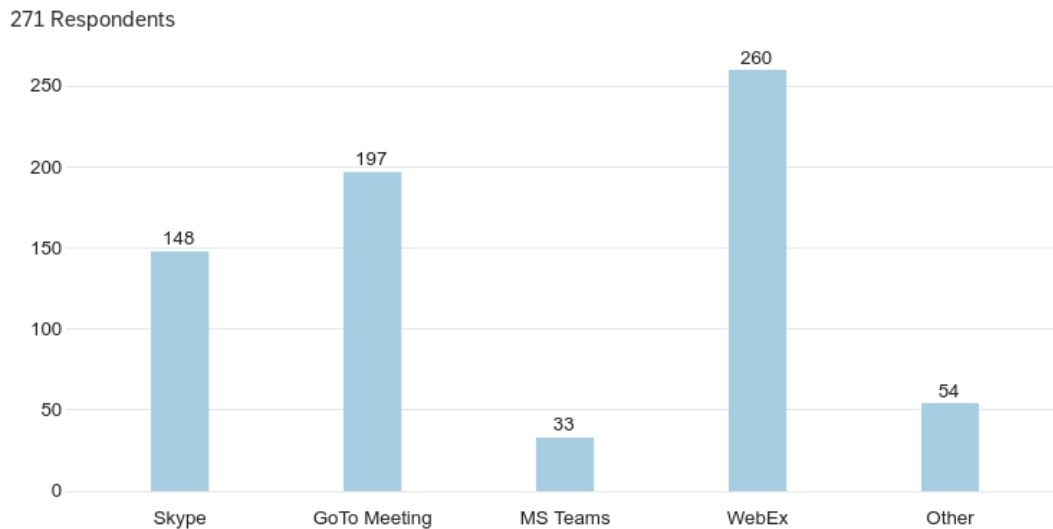
Videoconferencing

Videoconferencing is a key tool for remote collaboration. Surprisingly, some employees responded that they had not used any of the tools available to CPSC employees for collaborative work.

How often do you participate in a meeting using a videoconferencing tool each week?

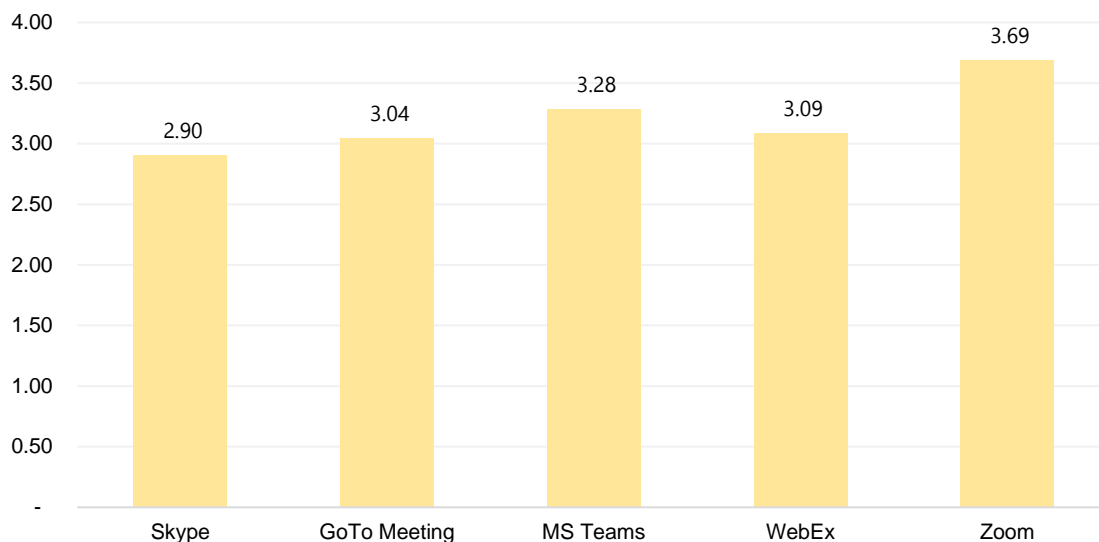


Please identify which video conferencing tools you have used:



The agency supports two videoconferencing tools, WebEx and Skype. However, two of the unsupported tools, Microsoft Teams and Zoom (43 of the Other users), received the highest scores for audio and video quality and ease of screen sharing and meeting setup.

Composite User Preference Scores for Virtual Meeting Tools*



*Responses were graded on a scale of 0 (lowest) to 4 (highest)

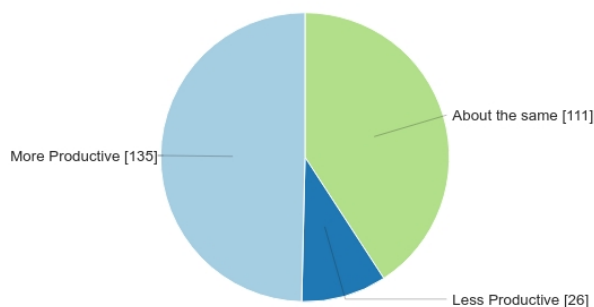
Source: OIG analysis of survey response data

Productivity and Supervision

Overall, about 90 percent of all respondents reported that they were as much, or more productive, since switching to fulltime telework.

For all employees: How do you feel your productivity level has been affected since going to mandatory fulltime telework?

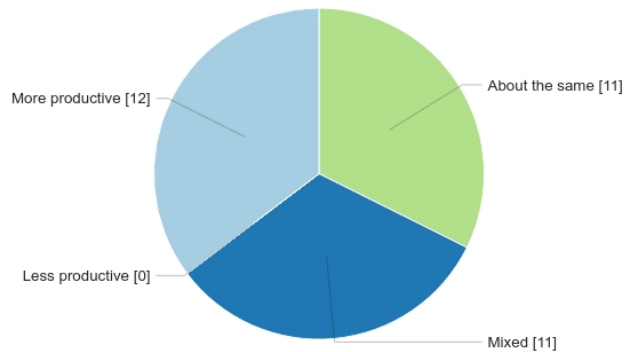
272 Responses



Of the 26 respondents who reported being less productive, 13 of them worked either in the lab, or in the field.

For supervisors: Overall, how productive do you think your staff is while on mandatory fulltime telework as compared to working in the office?

34 Responses



The staff self-assessment about productivity is supported by supervisors, most of whom reported that their staff is as productive or more productive since the move to mandatory fulltime telework. None of the supervisors believed that their staff were less productive.

Compared to before fulltime mandatory telework, how much time do you spend on supervisory tasks?

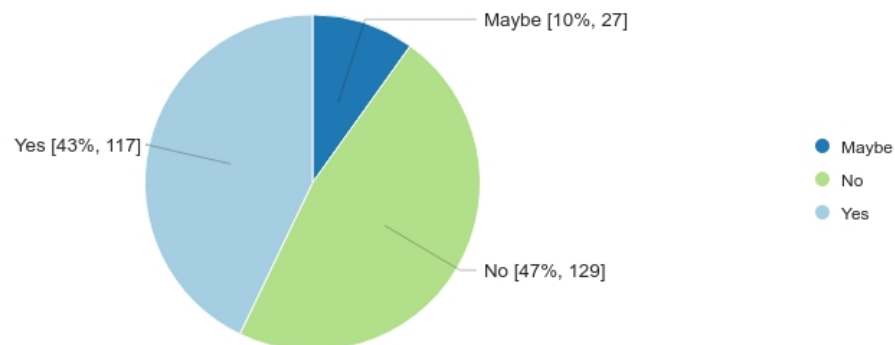
Over 74 percent of supervisors who responded stated that their time spent on supervisory tasks had not changed since moving to mandatory fulltime telework.

Opinions about Telework

This experience has given staff and supervisors much more comfort with telework.

Has your experience during mandatory fulltime telework changed your opinion about telework?

273 Responses



If yes, what is your opinion now?

114 Responses



The general staff responses indicated that 93 percent had become more favorable towards telework and seven percent had become less favorable. Of the 14 supervisors who reported that their opinion on telework has changed, all agreed it has become more favorable.

Telework Positives and Challenges

Employees reported more than twice as many positives versus challenges as a result of mandatory fulltime telework.

Please tell us what you found to be the most positive parts of mandatory fulltime telework:

The top five positive comments are:

- no commute (140 respondents)
- more productivity (65 respondents)
- more flexibility when scheduling work and personal responsibilities (52 respondents)
- fewer distractions (56 respondents)
- saving money (56 respondents)

Please tell us what you found to be the most challenging parts of mandatory fulltime telework:

The top five challenges identified are:

- lack of face-to-face interaction/socialization (57 respondents)
- IT connectivity issues (42 respondents)
- lack of equipment or access to equipment (25 respondents)
- communicating with coworkers or subordinates (16 respondents)
- family challenges (i.e. children at home distance learning) (12 respondents)

Future Telework

As a result of this experience with mandatory fulltime telework, more staff are interested in increased telework options. For this analysis, we only included staff assigned to headquarters or the lab.

Telework status per pay period prior to mandatory fulltime telework for employees who regularly teleworked was:

Days in Office per Pay Period	Non-Supervisors		Supervisors	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
No Days	2	1.4	-	-
7-8 Days	52	34.4	-	-
9-10 Days	97	64.2	29	100.0
Total	151	100.0	29	100.0

Prior to mandatory fulltime telework most employees who teleworked did so one day per week or two days per pay period.

Based on your experience with mandatory fulltime telework, how many days in the office per pay period would be optimal for you to complete your mission responsibilities?

Days in Office per Pay Period	<u>Non-Supervisors</u>		<u>Supervisors</u>	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
No Days	45	25.5	6	15.4
1-2 Days	54	30.7	12	30.7
3-4 Days	38	21.6	11	28.2
5-6 Days	19	10.8	9	23.1
7-8 Days	10	5.7	1	2.6
9-10 Days	10	5.7	0	0.0
Total	176	100.0	39	100.0

On average both supervisors and staff feel that the optimal number of days in the office per pay period is three or fewer.

Scope, Objective and Methodology

This survey was undertaken to understand CPSC employee's responses to the challenges and opportunities presented by the unprecedented move to mandatory fulltime telework beginning on March 16, 2020. We analyzed results as a whole and, as appropriate to the question, by work location and supervisory status.

This survey was a special project undertaken to address concerns about mandatory fulltime telework. Special projects are narrowly scoped projects carried out to answer specific questions. They are not necessarily listed in the OIG Annual Work Plan and are not performed in accordance with General Accepted Government Auditing Standards.

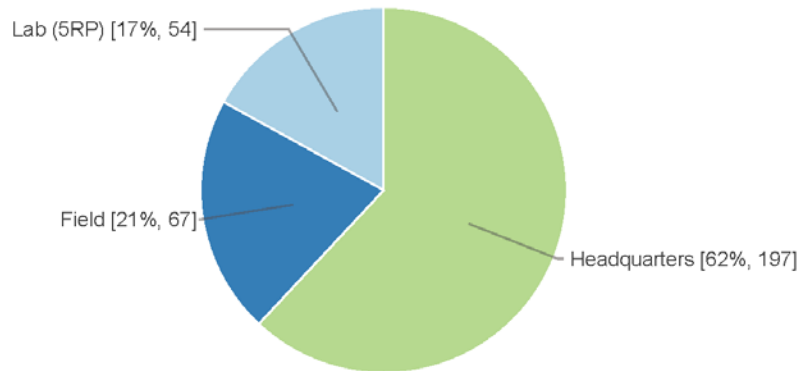
We conducted this survey from September 17-25, 2020, using Qualtrics survey software. This survey was sent to 539 unique email addresses and received 318 responses. The questions were developed by OIG staff. Questions were modified and assessed against best practices as described in professional survey literature. The survey was tested by OIG staff before it was distributed to agency employees. All survey respondents remain anonymous.

This project was an addition to the Fiscal Year 2020 OIG Annual Plan.

APPENDIX A: Additional Survey Questions

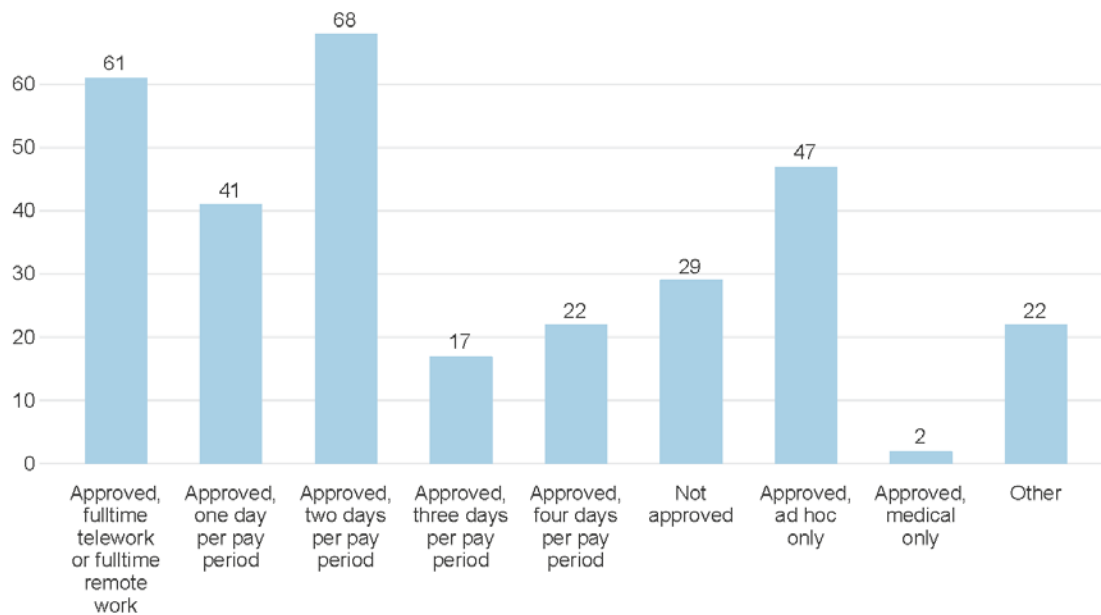
My regular work location prior to mandatory fulltime telework was:

318 Responses



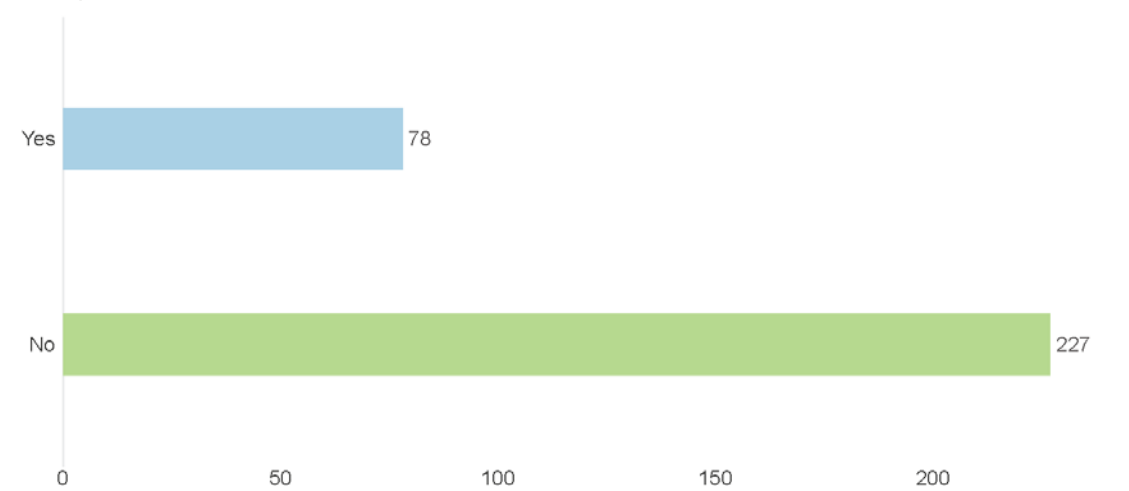
My telework status per pay period prior to mandatory fulltime telework was:

309 Responses



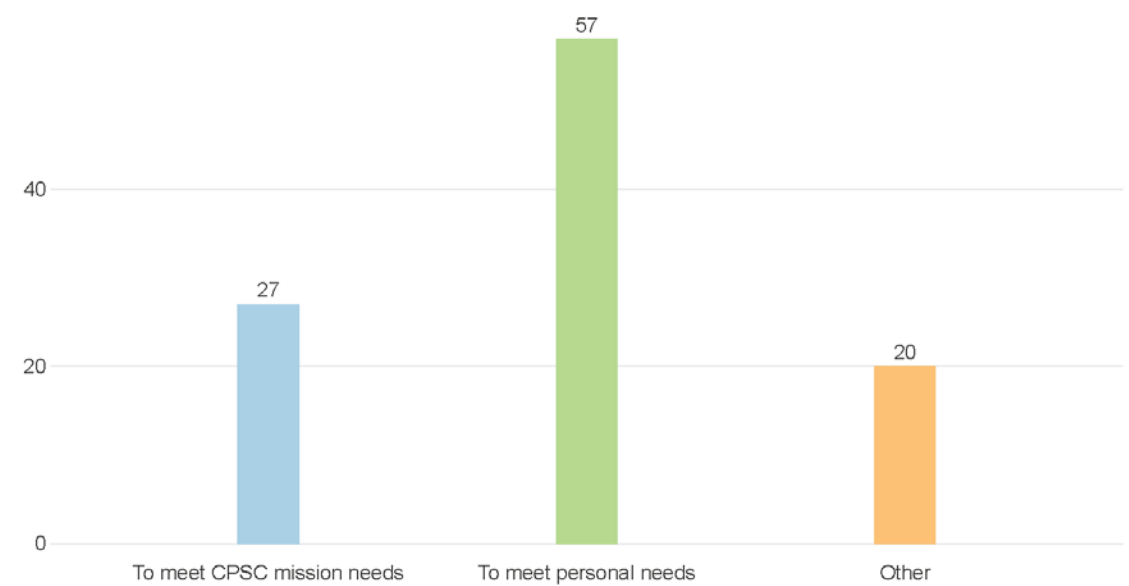
Did you change your work schedule in any way during mandatory fulltime telework?

305 Responses



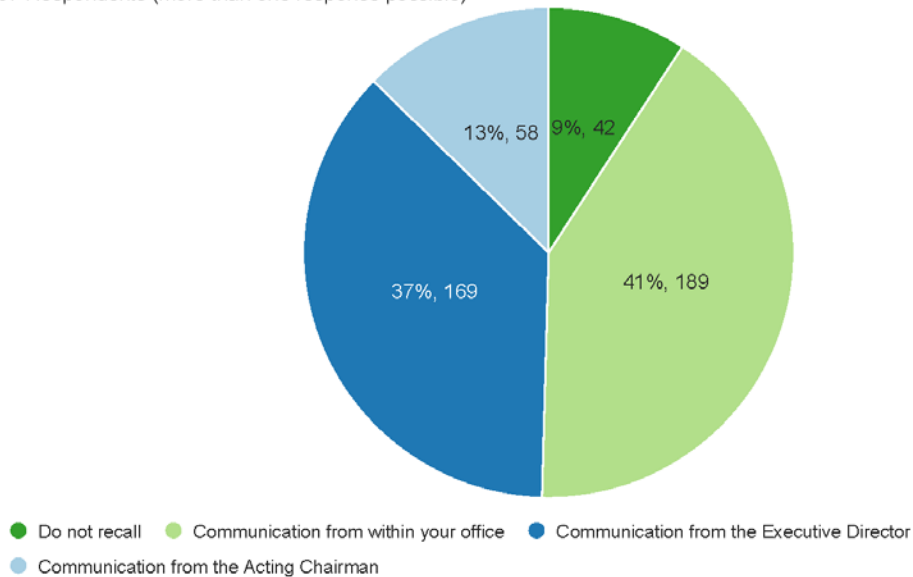
If you changed your schedule, please indicate why:

77 Respondents (more than one response possible)



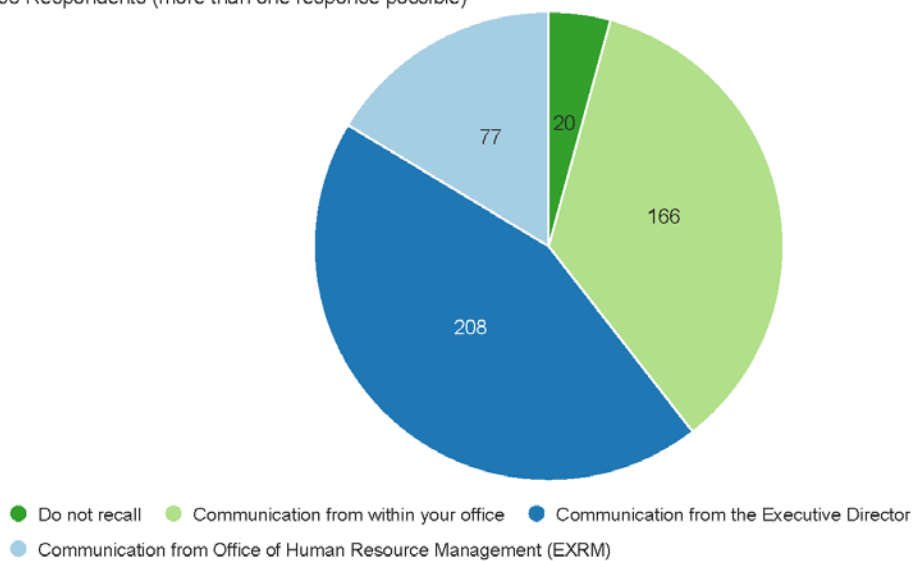
How did you learn about the switch to mandatory fulltime telework?

297 Respondents (more than one response possible)



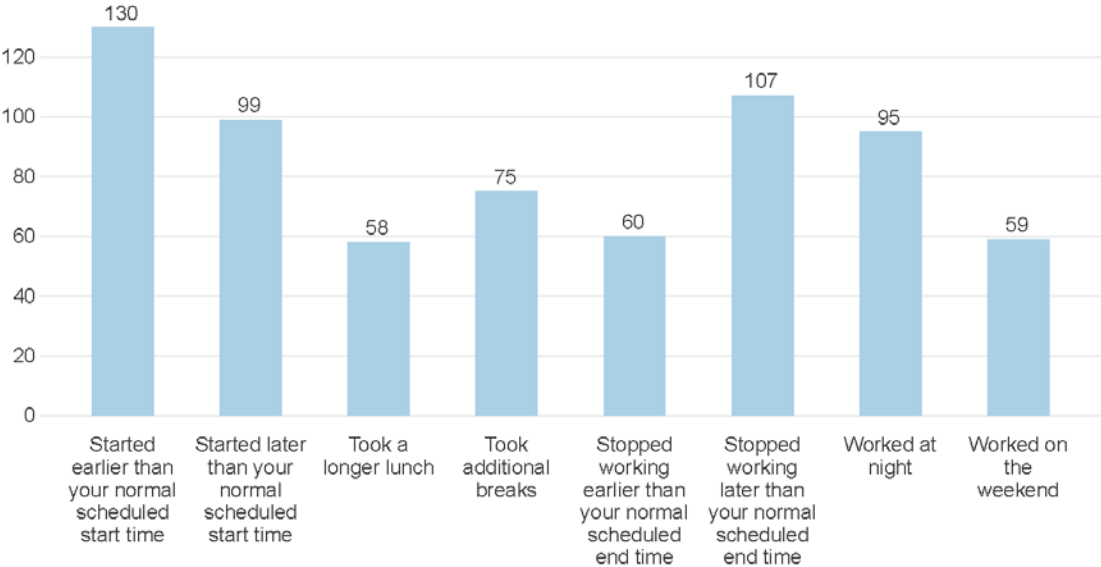
How did you hear about the maximum work schedule flexibilities CPSC offered during mandatory fulltime telework?

298 Respondents (more than one response possible)



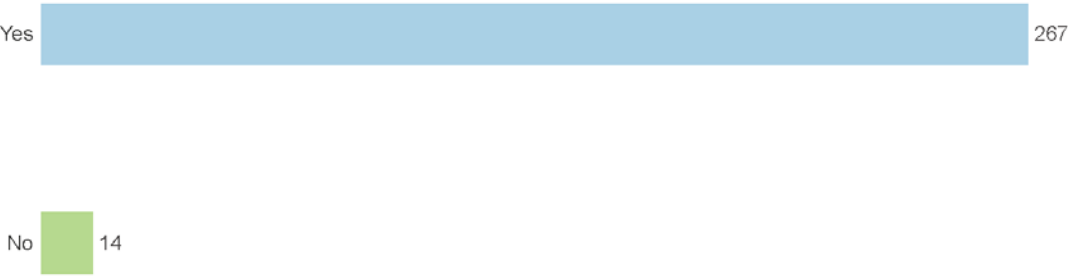
Which of these flexibilities have you personally used?

202 Respondents (more than one response possible)



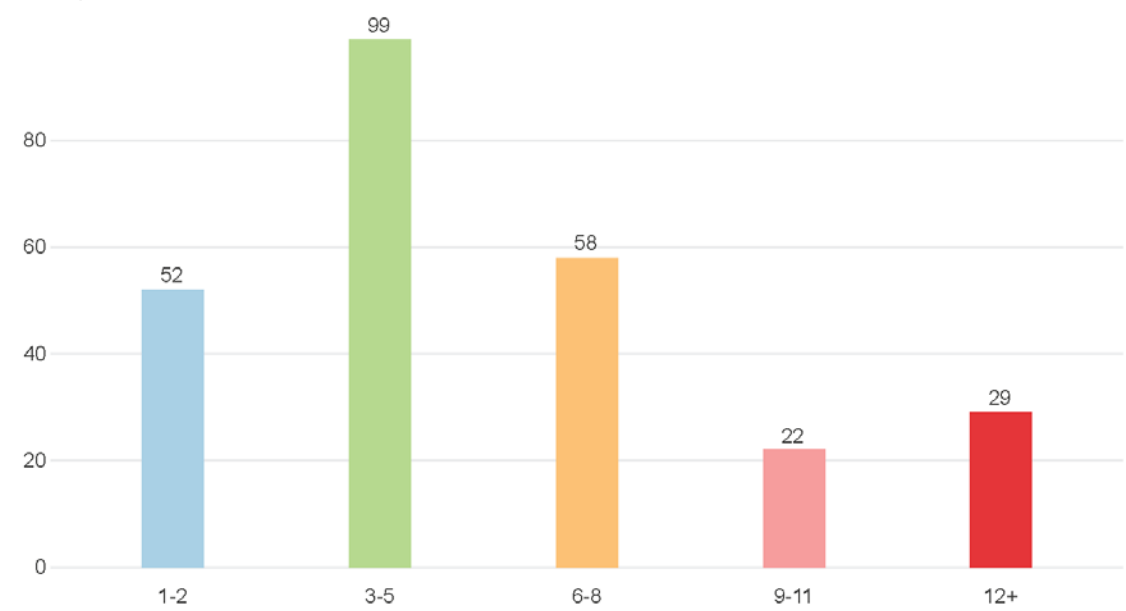
Have you contacted the IT Help Desk for assistance while on mandatory fulltime telework?

281 Responses



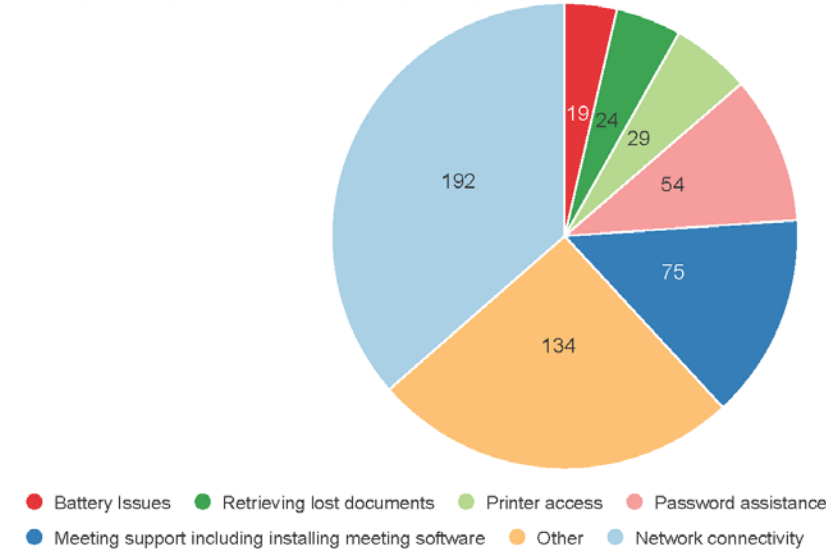
If yes, how many times have you contacted the IT Help Desk?

260 Responses



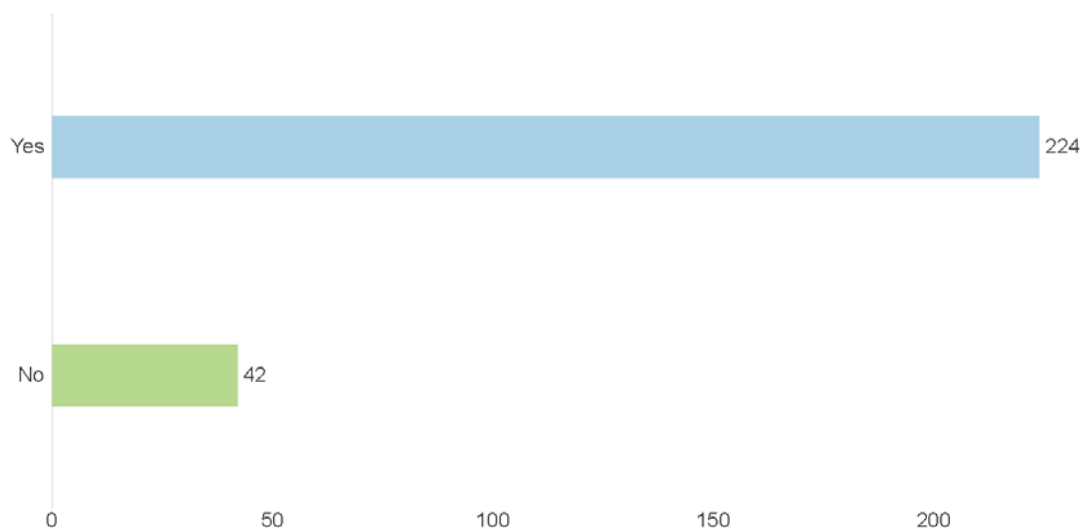
Please indicate the areas where you have needed assistance:

266 Respondents (more than one response possible)



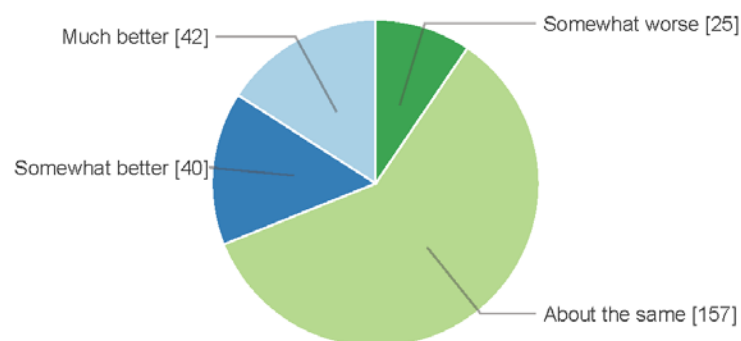
Was the IT Help Desk able to provide you the assistance you needed?

266 Responses



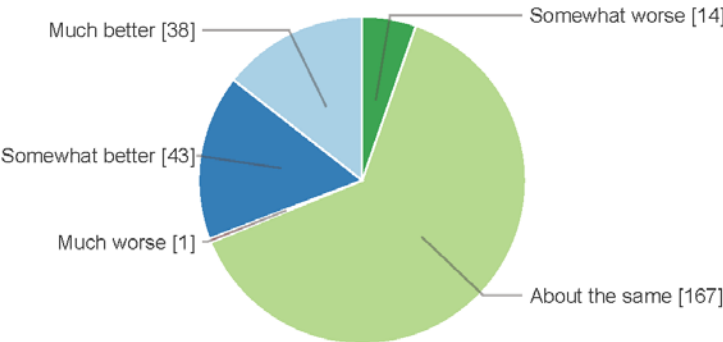
How would you rate the timeliness of the IT Help Desk response during mandatory fulltime telework as opposed to before mandatory fulltime telework?

264 Responses



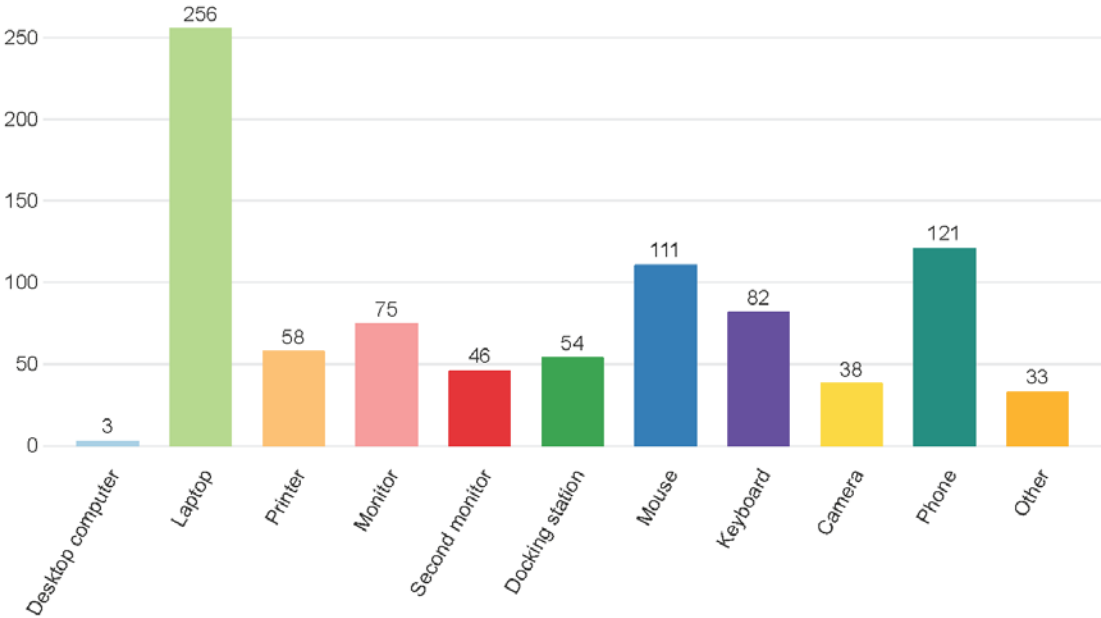
How would you rate the quality of the IT Help Desk response during mandatory fulltime telework as opposed to before mandatory fulltime telework?

263 Responses



Please indicate what CPSC resources you use in your home office:

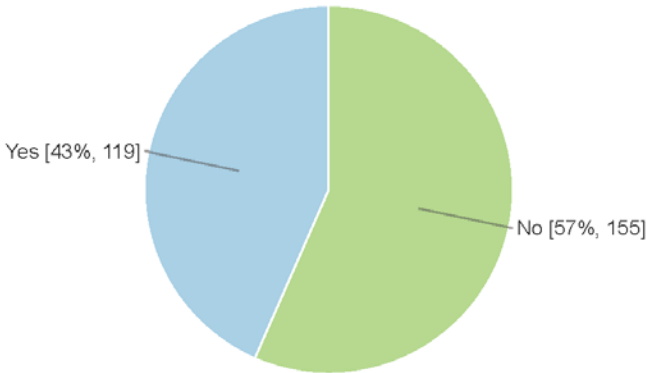
266 Respondents (more than one response possible)



Other: Cell Phone - 8, Headphones - 7

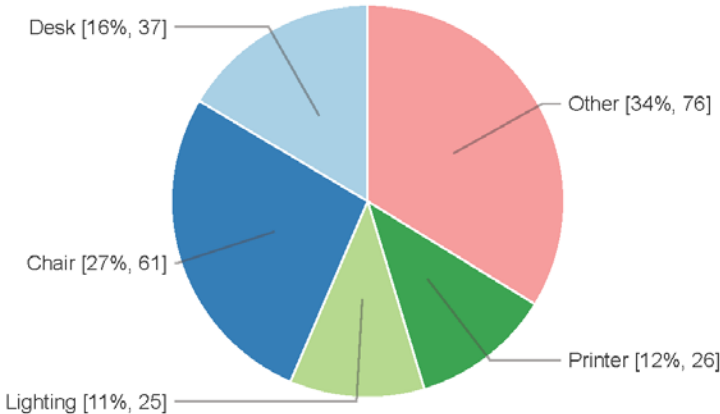
As a result of this move to mandatory fulltime telework did you purchase any office equipment to improve the work environment of your home office?

274 Responses



If you purchased office equipment, what did you purchase?

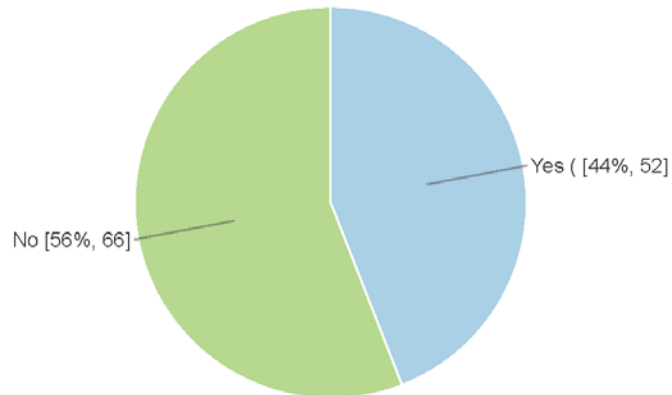
119 Respondents (more than one response possible)



Other: Monitor - 34, Mouse - 26, Keyboard - 14

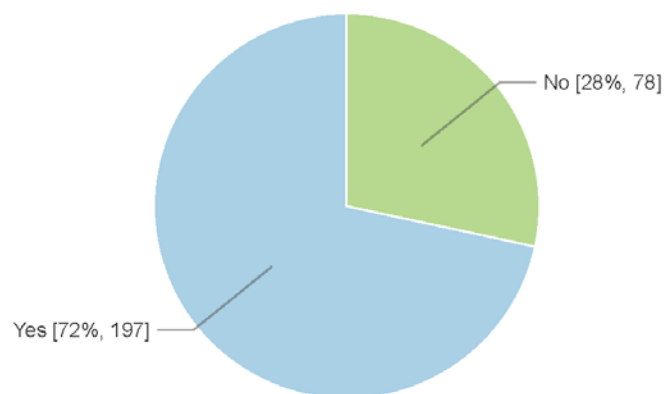
Did you purchase anything to improve the ergonomics of your home office?

118 Responses



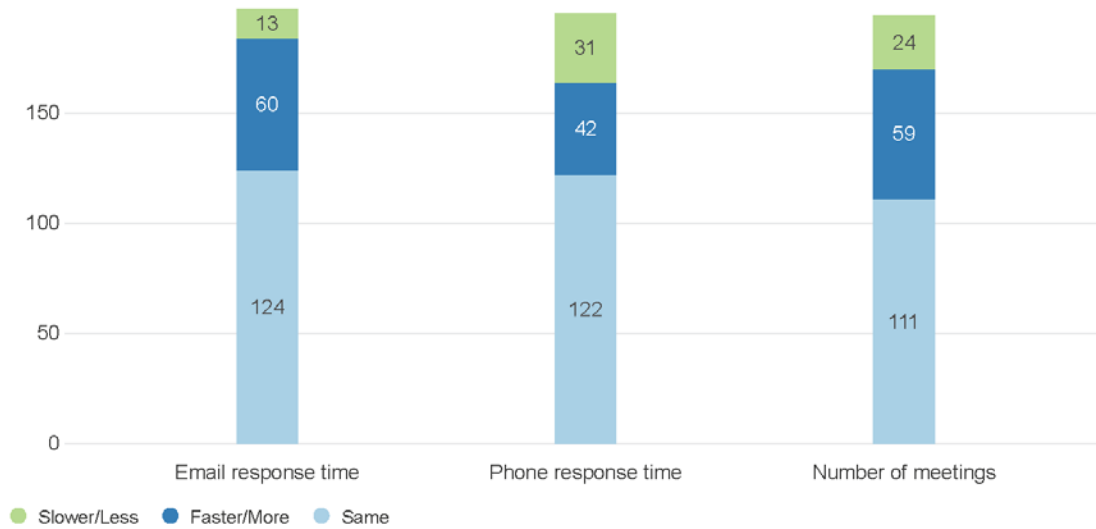
Do you regularly work with other CPSC employees outside of your program office?

275 Responses



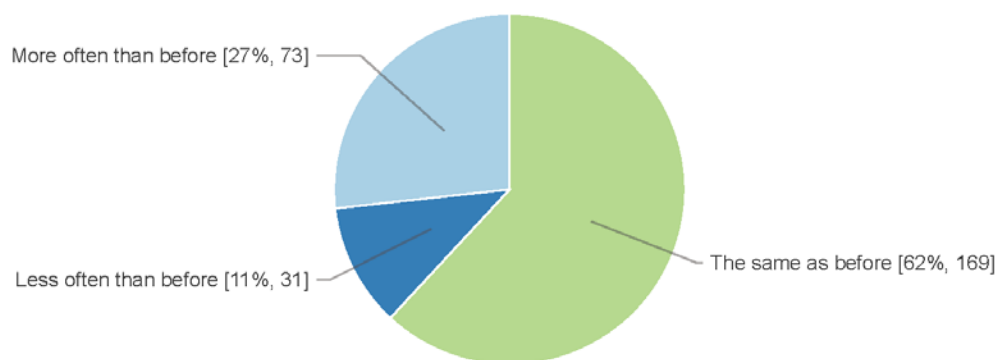
Please rate the following items compared to before mandatory fulltime telework:

197 Responses



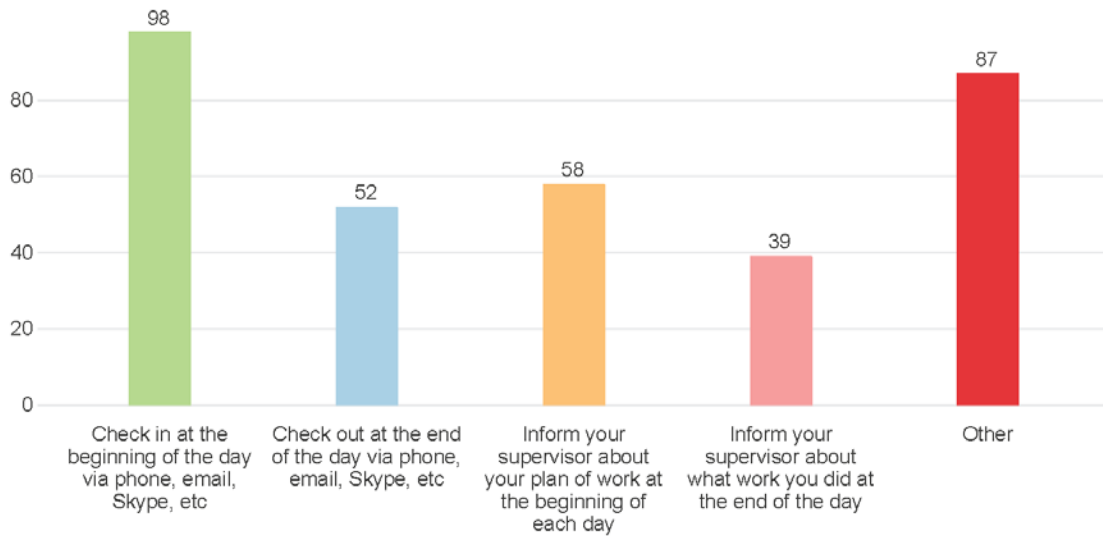
Since shifting to mandatory fulltime telework how often do you now communicate with your supervisor?

273 Responses



Since shifting to mandatory fulltime telework, does your supervisor now require you to:

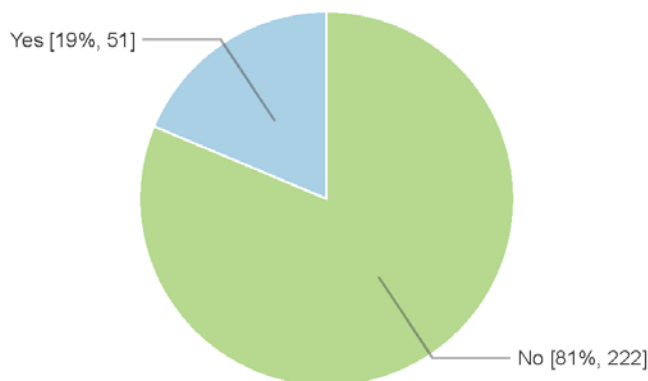
183 Respondents (more than one answer possible)



Other: Weekly Updates - 22, Regular Check-Ins - 16, Weekly Meetings - 14

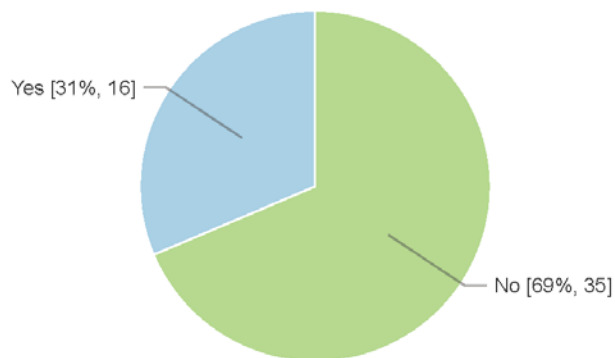
Do you supervise employees?

273 Responses



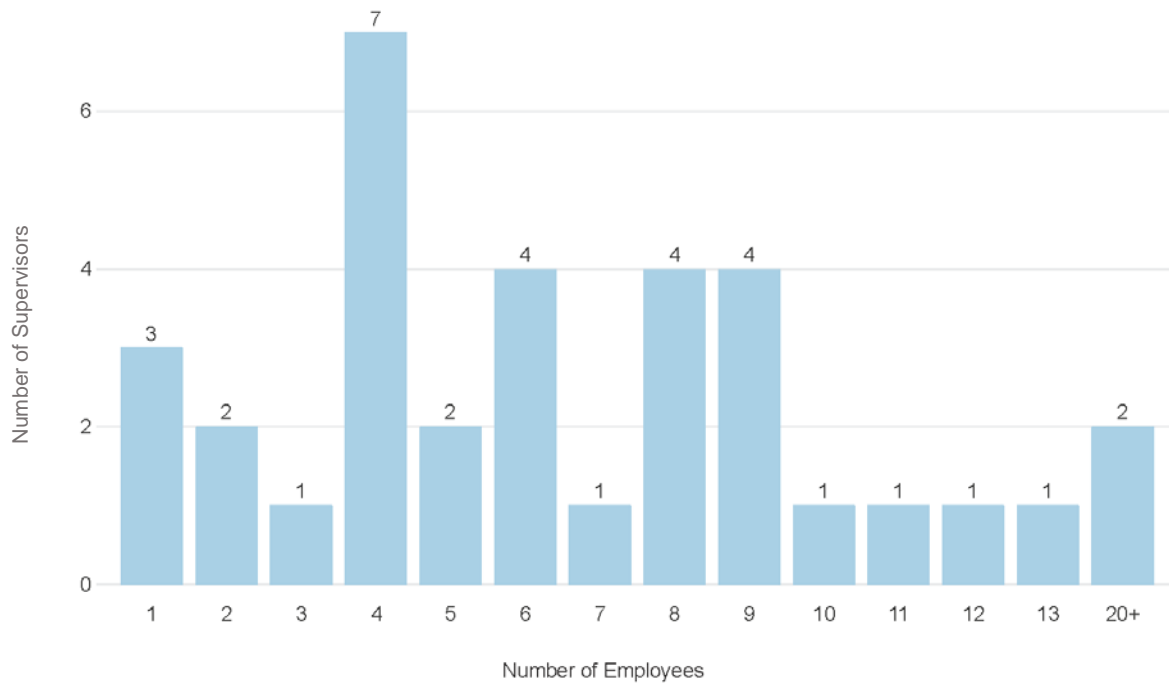
Before the entire agency switched to mandatory fulltime telework did you supervise only fulltime telework or remote employees?

51 Responses



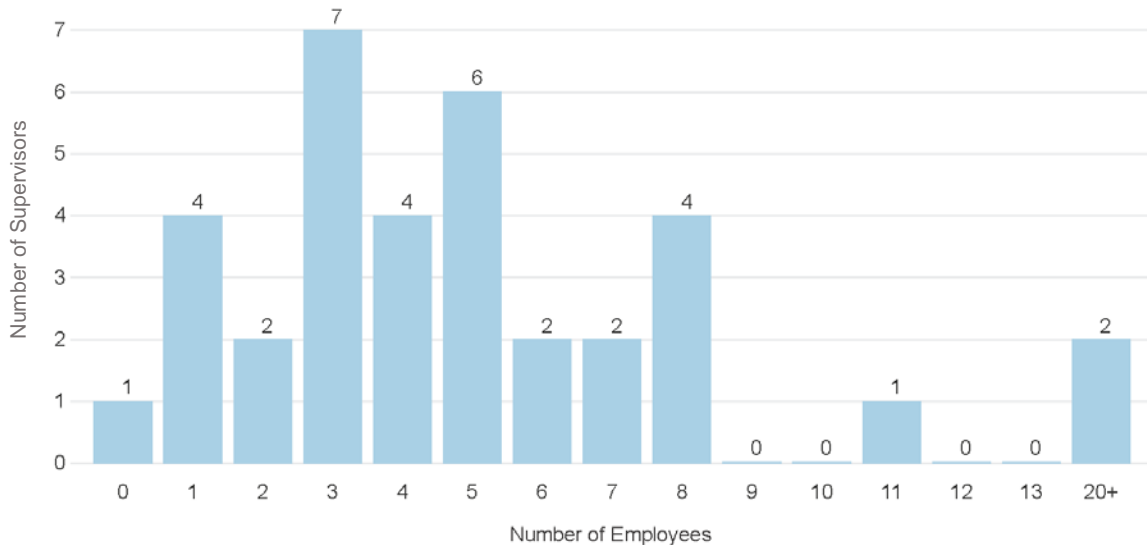
If no, how many employees do you supervise?

34 Responses



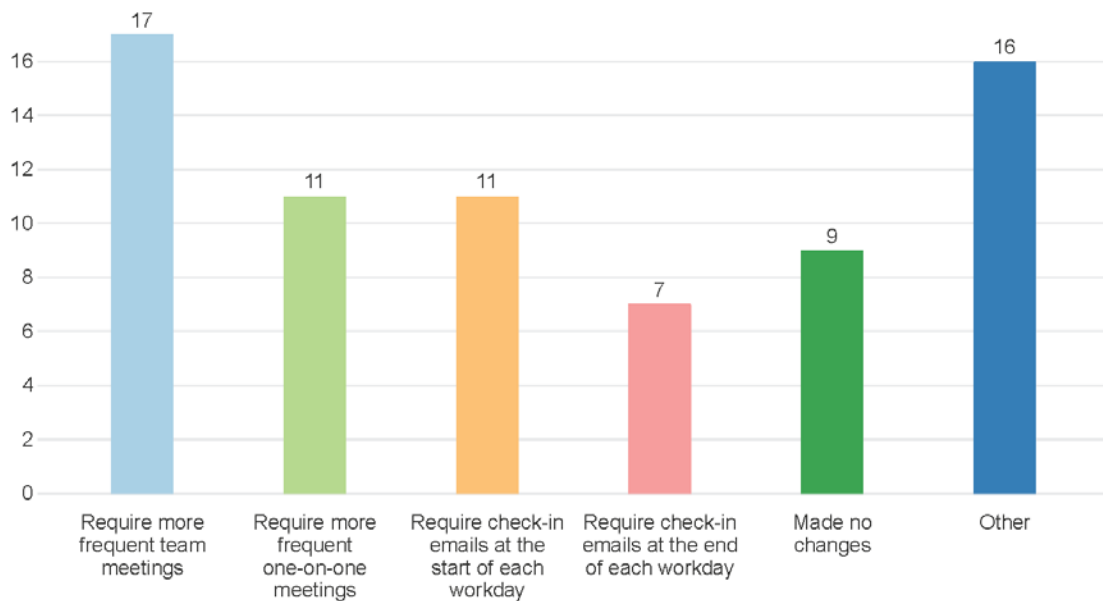
How many of the employees you supervise teleworked before CPSC shifted to mandatory fulltime telework?

35 Responses



What changes have you made to how you supervise employees since mandatory fulltime telework?

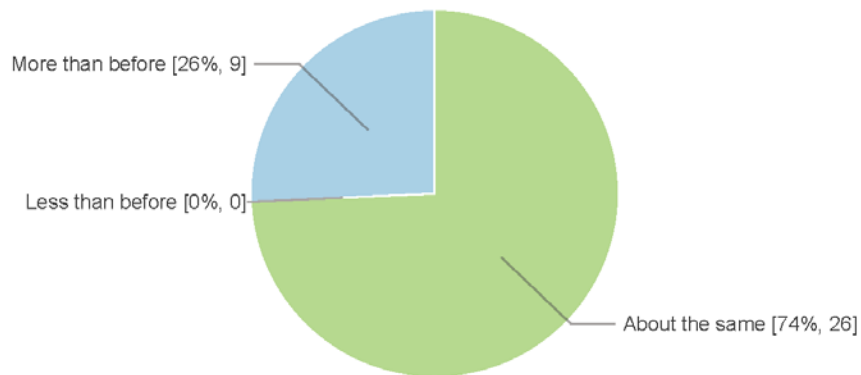
35 Respondents (more than one response possible)



Other: Check in Emails - 7, Phone/Video Conferencing - 5, Weekly Reports - 4

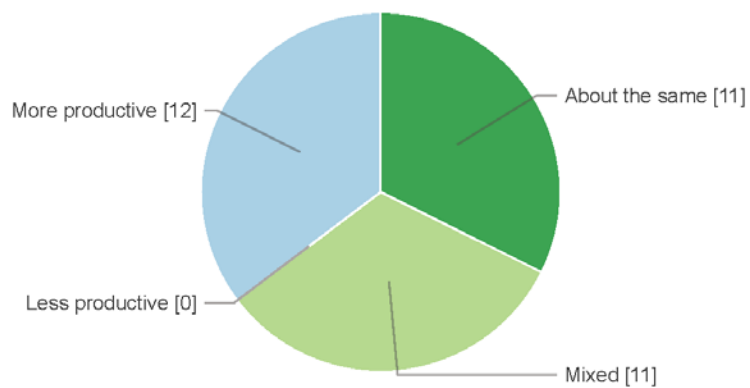
Compared to before fulltime mandatory telework, how much time do you spend on supervisory tasks?

35 Responses



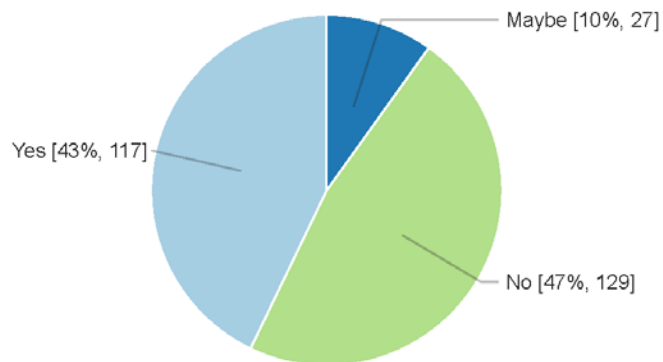
Overall, how productive do you think your staff is while on mandatory fulltime telework as compared to working in the office?

34 Responses



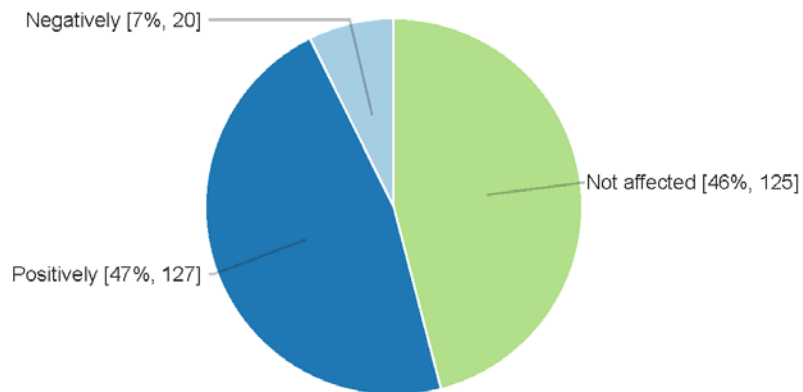
Has your experience during mandatory fulltime telework changed your opinion about telework?

273 Responses



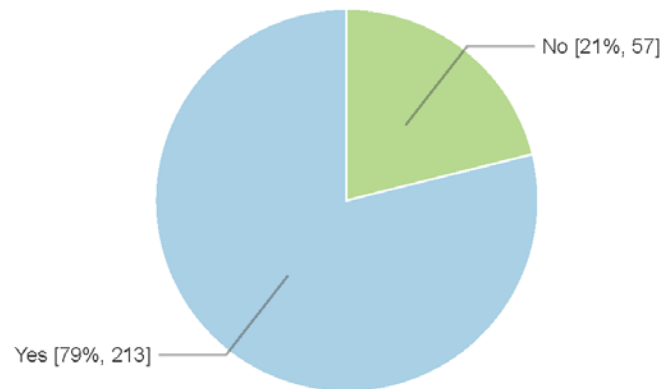
Based on this experience with full time telework, how has your ability to complete your daily tasks been affected?

272 Responses



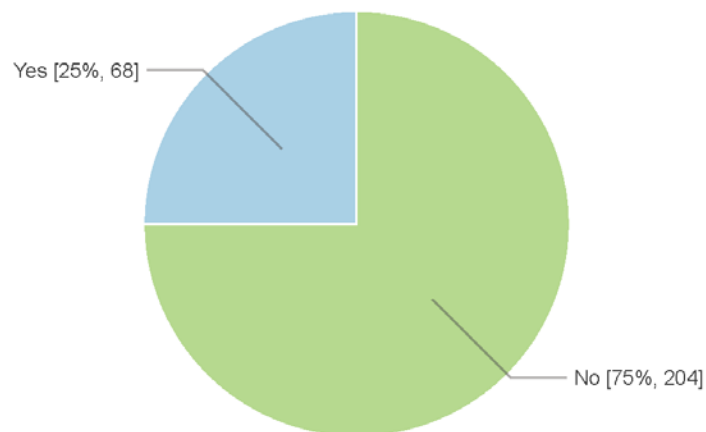
Have you saved money as a result of mandatory fulltime telework?

270 Responses



Have you incurred costs as a result of mandatory fulltime telework?

272 Responses



CONTACT US

If you want to confidentially report or discuss any instance of fraud, waste, abuse, misconduct, or mismanagement involving CPSC's programs and operations, please contact the CPSC Office of Inspector General.



Call:

301-504-7906
1-866-230-6229



On-line complaint form:

Click [here](#) for complaint form.

Click [here](#) for CPSC OIG Website.



Write:

Office of Inspector General
U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission
4330 East-West Highway, Room 702
Bethesda MD 20814