

# TOP SECRET TELEWORK

## 5 TIPS FOR CLEARED EMPLOYEES NAVIGATING REMOTE WORK OPTIONS

With the coronavirus demanding social distancing and creating new calls for workers in some communities to begin telework, some workers with security clearances may be wondering what their options are. Unfortunately, you can build a SCIF in your garage, but you won't be able to start performing classified work at home (the government verifies the facilities used to perform classified work). That doesn't mean that every employee with a security clearance does—or needs—to spend every day inside a classified facility, however. Telework should be on the table for some cleared workers—and off the table for others.

A 2018 RAND Report outlined the challenges and benefits of moving intelligence community work to unclassified facilities. In a prescient move, it noted how expanded telework options could help in future disasters or continuity of operation plan events—and the challenges. The report stated “using telework during a COOP event requires more than an agency policy on telework. It requires employees to understand the job functions they are allowed to conduct remotely and have access to the data and systems they need to conduct those functions, as well as to the collaboration tools to remain in communication with their own colleagues and with other offices.”



Unfortunately, many agencies and companies today are scrambling to consider what functions can be done remotely, and who should be eligible for telework. While the assumption may be that the possession of a security clearance necessitates a job that requires constant access to classified information, the reality is that many positions require an active federal security clearance due to the nature of where the work is conducted, rather than the work itself, or based on sporadic, rather than daily access to classified information. And with the rise of secure cloud computing options, remote desktop interfaces, and protocols to limit the transmission and export of data, the options for cleared workers to do the unclassified portions of their work from a remote location are greater now than ever before.

If you're navigating telework for the first time or wondering if it's even a possibility, here are five considerations to keep in mind.

## 1 KNOW YOUR TECH

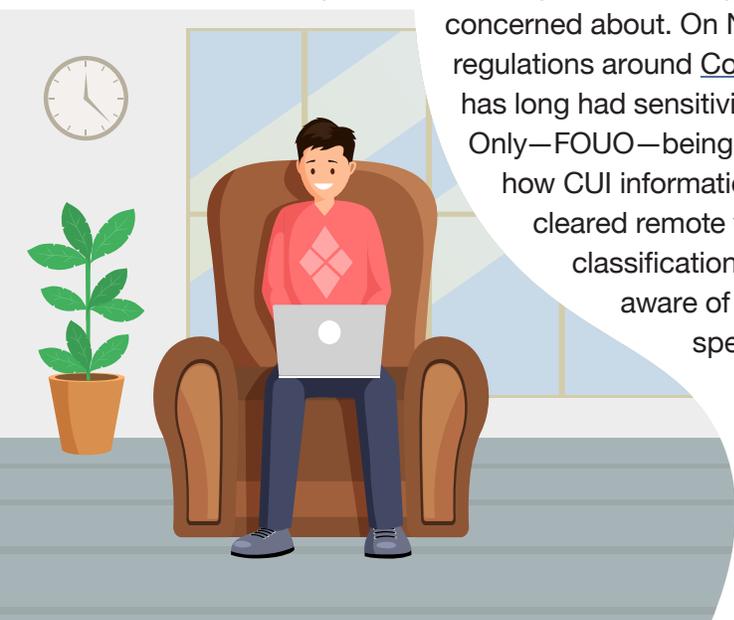
Hands-down, the greatest advancement to create options for secure (read: secure, not classified) telework has been cloud computing. That's just one of the reasons JEDI is such a highly contested and critically important contract for the Department of Defense. The roll out of Amazon Web Services to the intelligence community created several private sector solutions to help more developers create solutions for the federal government—no clearance required. Even engineers who find themselves interacting on the high side of the environment have found there is a growing degree of unclassified development work that can be done remotely before being rolled into the classified environment.

Most company-enabled remote interfaces have built in protocols to track employee activity and ensure data isn't exported. The issue isn't the export of classified information, but the general security of all company data. Those types of protocols are born out of new insider threat requirements, and the growing understanding that almost all company information—not just classified information—is of interest to foreign adversaries like Russia, China and Iran.



## 2 KNOW YOUR CLASSIFICATION MARKINGS

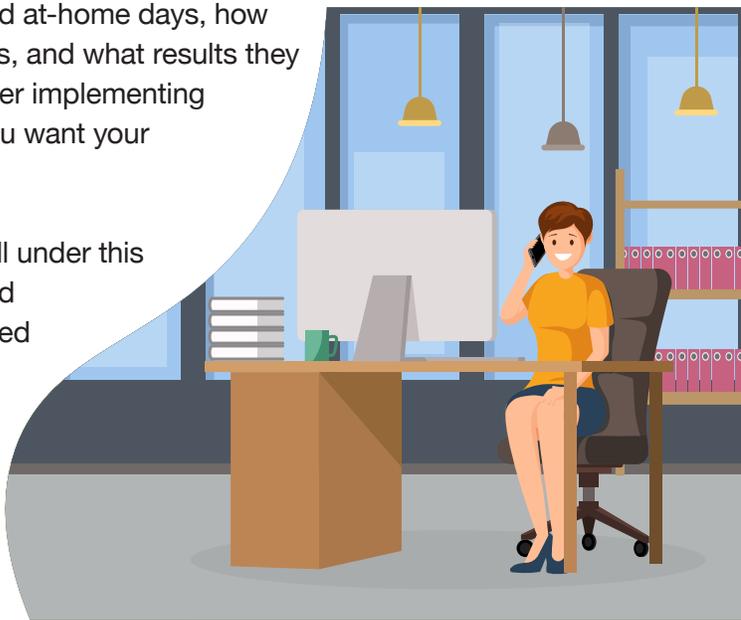
The remote teleworker likely knows not to stuff classified information into their pantyhose à la-Reality Winner. But keep in mind it's not just Secret, Top Secret and SAP security clearance holders need to be concerned about. On November 14, 2016, EO 13556 rolled out creating new regulations around Controlled Unclassified Information (CUI). The government has long had sensitivity markings beyond simply classified (For Official Use Only—FOUO—being the most commonly known). CUI creates regulation around how CUI information is stored and transferred—and is very applicable to the cleared remote worker. Just because something doesn't have a classification doesn't mean you should print it out and take it home. Be aware of any information that's sensitive and proprietary, and seek specific agency guidance for individual projects and programs.



### 3 STACK YOUR CLASSIFIED WORK

A key aspect of social distancing is taking steps to eliminate the numbers of people in crowded public spaces, including public transit or certain workspaces (hello, SCIF workers). Cleared workers who can take advantage of shift schedules to eliminate even one or two days in the office are taking an important step in adhering to the current advice of health officials. Begin looking at your days and explore how often you're truly accessing classified information, and which segments of your day. If you have classified meetings on specific days and spend other days doing admin, open source or unclassified work, speak with your supervisor about temporary options for remote work. Trust is a critical aspect of telework, so provide your supervisor a clear plan for how you'll spend your unclassified at-home days, how you'll take advantage of secure VPN or remote desktop tools, and what results they should expect from you on telework days. If you're a manager implementing telework for the first time, set clear expectations for what you want your employees to accomplish.

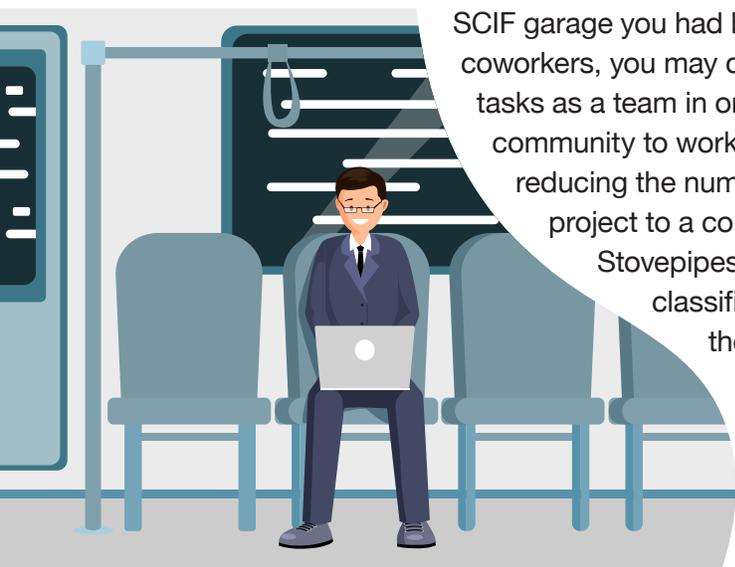
There are already a number of cleared professionals who fall under this type of work environment—doing unclassified or stove-piped development much of the time, and then traveling to classified client sites when required. These individuals work remotely for most of their weeks, but maintain a clearance because of their need to be on site doing critical work for specific days or in specific locations. Some professionals who currently work on site every day may find that much of their day-to-day work can similarly be done in an unclassified environment.



### 4 JOB SHARE

In our individualistic culture, job sharing can be a tough sell. But if you do classified work, chances are you can't just drop everything and begin working from home today (unless you can get [DCSA](#) to certify that SCIF garage you had built this weekend). But if you collaborate with your coworkers, you may discover ways to combine forces and accomplish individual tasks as a team in order to open up options for more members of your community to work from home, taking bodies off of public transportation and reducing the numbers in your office. Can you pass off a specific classified project to a colleague for a day or two and then pick it back up?

Stovepipes are second nature in many government agencies. Some classified workers may be remiss to work from home just because they can't stand the thought of someone taking the reigns of their project for a while. But now may be the time.



## 5 COMMUNICATE

Hands-down, the most critical aspect of any successful remote work environment, including for cleared workers, is active, engaged communication. Hands-on leadership and security have long been a positive hallmark of the national security community—but that’s not really what the CDC is recommending today. Now is the time to consider how you can connect across your staff when you can’t reach out and touch them—what BYOD options are available, what secure chat functions are enabled, and how many of those meetings are truly necessary.

Some employees may be comfortable coming into the office, and some job functions simply can’t be completed remotely. But now is the time to think critically—what open source intelligence, HR, tech, or admin jobs have unclassified functions that could be done remotely? How much of your job requires JWICS or SIPR, and how much falls under CUI?



Cleared workers are trusted workers. If we can trust individuals with our nation’s most critical secrets, we should be able to trust them with the option of performing some work from home during this unprecedented time. With candidate attraction more difficult than ever, and the government actively competing with the private sector for qualified workers, creating options for remote or telework—even simply as a part of a COOP or as-needed plan—may go a long way in showing your workforce you’re ready to innovate when they need you. Americans are great at turning adversity into innovation. Now is the time for cleared workers and workspaces to do the same.

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