



# **Bell County Employee Handbook**

## **Employee Version**

Adopted 2009

Bell County Commissioners' Court

Dear Bell County Employee:

This is the revised 2009 version of the Bell County Employee handbook, adopted by the Commissioners' Court. The Bell County Employee handbook is intended as a brief reference guide for your use in the event you have any employee related questions. There are new and revised policies throughout the handbook, therefore you should read this latest version to be sure you are aware of revisions and changes. The writers of the handbook cannot anticipate or address every circumstance or question that may apply to individual employees. If a situation arises, that is not addressed in this handbook please contact your department head, elected official, immediate supervisor or the human resources office. The Commissioners' Court continually reviews employee policies resulting changes on occasion. All changes take effect when passed by the Commissioners' Court.

Elected officials who serve as department heads may have different or added employee polices. A list of elected officials who have adopted the Bell County Employee Handbook are in an appendix at the end of this document. Elected officials who have adopted this handbook and the policies contained within, may at any time revoke the adoption, or add different policies by giving notice to his or her employees. If the elected official has adopted the Bell County Employee Handbook, any added department policies may not conflict with or contradict policies contained in this document. Appointed officials may have additional employee policies but no added policies may conflict with the policies contained within this document.

Bell County will issue an electronic version of the handbook via the Bell County web site, [www.bellcountytexas.com](http://www.bellcountytexas.com) to employees who have computer access. Bell County will issue printed copies of the handbook to those employees who do not have access to county computers. Please keep in mind the handbook is the property of Bell County, and you will be charged replacement costs (provided you were issued a hard copy) if you loose or damage the handbook beyond use. You must turn in the handbook when you leave employment with Bell County as part of the checkout process.

The language used in this employee handbook does not create, or constitute a contract between the County and any or all of its employees. Employment with Bell County is for no fixed or definite term, and either the employee or the County may sever the employment relationship at any time for any reason.

Sincerely,

The Bell County Commissioners' Court

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# **Bell County Employee Handbook**

**HANDBOOK AND PERSONNEL POLICIES:** This document containing employee policies is for orientation and training purposes only and is not an employment contract. Bell County reserves the right to change or make exceptions to its policies, procedures and benefits, whether contained herein or otherwise communicated to employees, (all hereinafter referred to as policies) without advance notice.

No Bell County employee has the authority to bind Bell County to policies different from those in this handbook or to make any contract of employment. Additionally, any variation of any policy of Bell County and any contract of employment with Bell County can be made only by an elected official and must be in writing and signed by the Bell County Judge.

This handbook is the property of Bell County. This revised handbook replaces the County's previous employee handbooks.

## **Section 100 General Personnel Guidelines**

### **100 Official Employee Records**

Bell County will maintain all official employment related files, and when applicable, a separate medical file. Personnel and medical files are the property of Bell County and information contained within those files shall be consistent with federal, state and local government regulations. Personnel files should contain documents related only to employment. For example, applications, resumes and other application documents, W-4s, change of status forms, termination of employment forms, letters of recognition or commendation, among others. Employee medical files contain employee documents related to workers' compensation, FMLA, medical leave of absence forms, documents pertaining to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), drug screenings and results required for pre-employment physical exams, and other medical information required by applicable law.

Individual employees do not have a right of privacy in his or her personnel files. Personnel files are the property of Bell County and individual employees have no ownership interest in his personnel file. Employees wishing to view his or her personnel file may be allowed to do so on request but only in the presence of a Human Resources office staff member.

### **102 Directory Information**

Employees are required to promptly report any changes of name, address, telephone number, or number of eligible dependents. Such information is required by Bell County for matters such as federal withholding and insurance coverage. That information should be provided to the Payroll Department.

### **103 Equal Employment Opportunity Employer**

All employees and job applicants are guaranteed equality of employment opportunity under state and federal law. Essentially, this means that Bell County will not discriminate against any worker or applicant based on race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, disability, or veteran status. All recruitment, selection, placement, training and layoff decisions made by Bell County supervisors or managers will be based on job-related qualifications and abilities of candidates without any illegal discrimination.

All other personnel policies and practices of Bell County, including compensation, benefits, discipline, and safety and health programs, as well as social and recreational activities, will be administered and conducted without regard to any individual's race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, disability, or veteran status. Bell County will take all necessary steps to ensure that each employee's work environment is free of unlawful discrimination or harassment based on race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, disability, or veteran status. Bell County will take all necessary steps to see that applicants and employees with known disabilities are reasonably accommodated and that all applicable federal, state and local laws regarding employment are complied with. Applicants and employees who have a disability and who need a reasonable accommodation are encouraged to notify the Human Resource Office so that Bell County can make a reasonable accommodation.

Bell County does not discriminate based on sex, unless the job requires specific gender (for example female corrections officers supervising female inmates). All references in any Bell County materials to masculine terms or pronouns such as "he" or "his" shall be read to mean the feminine equivalent such as "she" or "hers" and similarly all reference to female terms or pronouns shall be read to mean the masculine equivalent.

### **104 At-Will Employment**

All employees of Bell County are employees *at will* and as such are free to resign from employment at anytime with or without reason. Bell County retains the same right to discharge any employee at any time with or without cause or advance notice. Nothing contained in this handbook or any other document provided to the employee is intended to be, nor should it be, construed as a contract that employment or any other benefit will be continued for any time. No Bell County official or employee shall promise or guarantee any employee employment for any period of time nor make any guarantee of salary or benefits. Any salary numbers provided to an employee in annual or monthly terms are stated for the sake of convenience or to facilitate comparisons and are not intended and do not create an employment contract for any specific period of time.

Bell County employees may be disciplined, demoted, transferred, or discharged at any time with or without notice or cause. No statements found in this handbook are intended to or will limit a supervisor's right to discipline an employee providing there is a reason. Further, supervisors administering discipline or discharging an employee are not required to follow any specific procedure or comply with any of the procedures described within this handbook, which are guidelines only.

### **105 Voluntary Termination (Resignations)**

Employees who are resigning should provide two-week's advance notice.

### **106 Automatic Termination Policy**

Employees who are absent from work for any reason for 90 consecutive days will be discharged. Discharged employees may reapply for employment with Bell County, but Bell County will have no obligation to rehire any employee

### **107 Out Processing; COBRA Information, Retirement information (if applicable)**

Any employee who resigns or is discharged by a department head or elected official must report to the Human Resources Office, third floor, historic court house, 101 E. Central, Belton, TX for out processing. The employee will receive COBRA information, retirement information, where applicable, and other information relating to termination of employment with Bell County. Employees resigning or discharged will have an opportunity to fill out an exit interview form or request an exit interview with the Human Resources Director.

### **108 Transfers between Departments**

Department heads and elected officials should coordinate all approved employee transfers from one department to another with the payroll department. Because of payroll processes, the payroll department highly recommends that employee transfers occur during the first day of the pay period.

### **109 Employee Identification Badges**

All employees in each department should wear a picture, identification badge while on duty unless excused from doing so by the employee's department head or elected official. The Human Resources Department will issue identification badges. Employees who have lost ID badges will be asked to reimburse Bell County for replacement costs.

### **110 Employee Travel and Reimbursement**

Bell County employees on occasion use personal vehicles to travel when performing authorized County business. The County reimburses employees who use personal vehicles for County travel for each mile driven at a rate set annually by the County. The following rules apply for mileage reimbursement:

- No travel expenses may be incurred by any employee without authorization from an elected official or department head
- Employees or officials receiving monthly travel allowances will not be eligible for reimbursement for in-county travel
- When two or more employees travel in the same vehicle, only one may claim mileage reimbursement.

Employees claiming mileage reimbursement must submit a request for payment on the County's official travel form approved by the department head or elected official

### **111 Media Relations**

Frequently, department heads and elected officials solicit news coverage of important new developments, laws, services and other need-to-know public information. To maintain accuracy and consistency, employees who receive inquiries from the news media must follow the following guidelines and procedures:

- No employee may grant an interview or make comments about County business without approval of the County Judge or the employee's elected official or department head.
- The County judge, an elected official or a department head may designate a spokesperson to handle certain types of routine inquiries and contacts with local news media or information requests.
- No one, including County officials, should make *off the record* statements to the media.

### **112 Voting**

Bell County employees are encouraged to vote. Employees may choose to vote on early voting days or on election days for candidates of their choice. Elected officials and department heads are encouraged, but not required, to grant a reasonable amount of time off, at full pay, to employees who wish to vote during working hours.

### **113 Involvement in Political Campaigns**

Bell County employees may not become involved in political campaigns during working hours. Employees may not use County equipment for political purposes nor will employees be required to participate in political campaigns or related activities as a condition of obtaining or retaining employment. In addition, Bell County will not discipline, discharge, or deprive any employee of employment rights for refusal to participate in such activities while off duty.

County employees, to include elected officials and department heads, will not:

- Use official authority or influence to interfere with or affect the results of any election or nomination for office;
- Coerce, attempt to coerce, command, or advise another person to pay, lend, or contribute anything of value to a party, committee, organization, agency or person for a political reason;
- Use any equipment, property or material owned by Bell County for personal political use

### **114 Protected Health Information - HIPAA**

**Access to HIPAA – protected health information** – Employees who, in the course of performing his or her duties, obtain information which is protected health information are expected to treat such information with the utmost confidentiality. Such information should only be disclosed to others who are specifically authorized to have access to such information and only on a need to know basis.

The Human Resources Department has the complete policies related to protected health information and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). You may contact the Human Resources office for more information about HIPAA.

### **115 Employment Outside of Bell County**

Your job with Bell County should be your primary job. If you have a moonlighting or second job, you must inform your supervisor of the details. The second job must not interfere with assigned overtime work.

## **Section 200: Workplace Expectations; Employee Complaints**

### **200 Ethics**

Employees of Bell County are public servants. As such, they are expected to continually conduct themselves in an ethical and appropriate manner, which does not reflect poorly on the County. The following are examples of unethical or inappropriate behaviors, which may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination:

- Conducting county business with a firm in which a county employee or close relative of the employee has substantial ownership or interest;
- Borrowing money from customers or firms from which the County buys services, materials, equipment or supplies;
- Accepting substantial gifts or excessive entertainment from an outside organization or agency;
- Misusing privileged information or revealing confidential information or data to outsiders;
- Using one's position in Bell County and knowledge of County business for outside personal gain.

Employment in Bell County carries with it a responsibility to be continually aware of ethical conduct. Employees must refrain from taking part in or exerting influence in any transaction in which their own interests may conflict with the best interests of Bell County.

### **201 General Work Rules and Expectations for Work**

Orderly and efficient operations of Bell County departments require that employees adhere to certain rules, expectations, and proper conduct and standards at all times. Rules and standards are necessary to protect the health and safety of all employees, to maintain uninterrupted production and to protect Bell County's goodwill and property. Employees should be familiar with and adhere to all departmental and county rules.

Bell County citizens are our *customers*. Employees are to serve Bell County citizens and anyone in need of assistance. Employees are expected to always cheerfully serve Bell County citizens, to meet his or her needs, and above all, to avoid giving any customer the *bureaucratic run-around*. As a Bell County employee, you are expected to represent the County and its elected officials and to meet any situations that arise calmly and courteously.

## **202 Employee Discipline**

Employees may be disciplined, demoted, transferred, or discharged at any time with or without notice or cause. Nothing contained in this section on disciplinary procedure or anywhere else in this handbook limits an elected official's or department head's right to discipline or discharge an employee at any time for any reason. Further, such discipline or discharge is not required to follow any specific procedure or progression or to comply with any of the procedures set out herein. Disciplinary procedures are guidelines only and do not limit the elected official's or department head's rights. Depending on the employee's conduct Bell County may impose any or all of the following disciplinary actions in any sequence or order:

- Oral warnings – oral counseling, documented and placed in applicable employee personnel file
- Written warnings – copy placed in applicable employee personnel file
- Suspension—with or without pay; or
- Dismissal

## **203 Harassing Behavior**

It is an expectation that employees will treat each other with respect and professionalism. Any Bell County employee found harassing another Bell County employee based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age or physical or mental disability or other protected characteristic is in violation of Bell County's policy and will be subject to disciplinary action up to and including immediate termination. Examples of harassing behavior include but are not limited to ethnic jokes, racial slurs, derogatory name-calling, or any other offensive conduct that may offend or impair an employee's ability to perform his or her job.

This policy extends to and prohibits harassment of suppliers, vendors, clients, or customers. Conversely, if the harasser is a client, vendor, supplier, customer, or any other individual, the County employee is to report the incident to his or her supervisor.

## **204 Sexual Harassment**

It continues to be the policy of the County that sexual harassment of employees or applicants for employment in any form is unacceptable conduct which will not be tolerated.

Sexual harassment includes, but is not limited to:

- any unwelcome sexual advances, including unsolicited sexual comments
- requests for sexual favors,
- other verbal, visual or physical conduct of a sexual nature
- pressure for sexual activity
- sexist remarks about a person's body or sexual activities
- patting, pinching, or unnecessary touching

No supervisor or other employee shall threaten or insinuate, either explicitly or implicitly, that another employee's or applicant's refusal to submit to sexual advances will adversely affect that person's employment, work status evaluation, wages, advancement, assigned duties, shifts, or any other condition of employment or career development. Similarly, no employee shall promise, imply or grant any preferential treatment in connection with another employee or applicant engaging in sexual conduct.

### **205 Reporting Harassment**

Any employee who feels that he or she is a victim of sexual harassment by any supervisor, management official, other employee, customer, client or any other person in connection with employment at the County should bring the matter to the immediate attention of their supervisor. An employee who is uncomfortable for any reason in bringing such matter to the attention of his or her supervisor, or is not satisfied after bringing the matter to the attention of his or her supervisor, should report the matter to the Human Resources Director, his or her Department Head, any County Commissioner, or the County Judge. Any questions about this policy or potential harassment should also be brought to the attention of the same persons. The County will promptly investigate all allegations of harassment and take appropriate corrective action if warranted.

Employees who observe harassment should report that occurrence or occurrences to his or her supervisor. An employee who is uncomfortable for any reason in bringing such matter to the attention of his or her supervisor, or is not satisfied after bringing the matter to the attention of his or her supervisor, should report the matter to the Human Resources Director, his or her Department Head, any County Commissioner, or the County Judge.

Any employee who is determined, after an investigation, to have engaged in sexual harassment in violation of this policy will be subject to appropriate sanctions up to and including immediate termination.

Employees are expected to cooperate with any investigation of alleged harassment. Failure to do so may lead to discipline, up to and including immediate termination.

### **206 Involuntary Discharges**

Bell County employees may be disciplined, demoted, transferred, or discharged at any time with or without notice or cause. No statements found in this handbook are intended to or will limit a supervisor's right to discipline an employee providing there is a reason. Further, supervisors administering discipline or discharging an employee are not required to follow any specific procedure or comply with any of the procedures described within this handbook, which are guidelines only.

## **207 Examples of Reasons Bell County may Dismiss Employees**

The following are examples of conduct, which may result in dismissal. Following are examples only and in no way limit the ability of the County to terminate employees for other reasons or no reason:

- Accepting bribes in the course of work
- Negligent or willful damage of public property
- Falsification of official documents or records
- Unauthorized copying, use of or disclosure of information restricted by law
- Insubordination
- Continual violation of safety procedures
- Theft of public property or public money
- Failure to properly perform work
- Disruptive conduct
- Attendance issues
- Other

## **208 Violence in the Workplace**

It is a goal of Bell County to provide a safe and secure work environment for employees free of violence. Thus, acts or threats of violence by any employee against another employee or another person will not be tolerated while on duty. Employees should promptly report any such conduct or threats. Further, any employee who engages in fighting, physical attacks, assaults, or intimidation or who makes threats of physical violence or of an attack or assault will be subject to discipline, up to and including immediate termination of employment. Employees are prohibited from stealing, damaging, or destroying property, and are also prohibited from threatening to steal, damage, or destroy property of others, including County property.

## **209 Contraband in the Workplace**

With the exception of weapons approved for law enforcement personnel and other employees lawfully approved to carry weapons, Bell County employees are not to possess weapons on County property at any time, including County-owned vehicles. While on duty, employees not affiliated with Bell County law enforcement or otherwise lawfully approved to carry firearms may not carry a weapon of any type onto County property. Examples of banned weapons include, but are not limited to, handguns, stun guns, knives, mace, pellet guns, rifles, batons, and blackjacks.

## **210 Tobacco Use in Bell County Buildings**

In keeping with the intent to provide a safe and healthy workplace, the County prohibits employees and visitors from using tobacco products of any kind inside of any county buildings. The Commissioners' Court authorizes elected officials and department heads to establish an outside smoking area out of public view. Employees in violation of the tobacco use policy may be subject to discipline.

## **211 Maintaining Confidentiality**

Employees shall maintain the confidentiality of information acquired in the course of his duties for the County and shall use that information for official and job-related purposes

only. Further, such information shall only be disclosed and communicated on a need to know basis and in accordance with rules of the County for maintaining confidentiality. Employees should not share any confidential information unless specifically authorized to do so by a department head or elected official. Specific requirements for maintaining confidentiality may vary from department to department and from job to job. Employees are responsible for familiarizing themselves with and adhering to any policies and requirements of confidentiality established for and applying to his department.

### **212 Searches of Personal Property**

While it is Bell County's desire not to interfere with an employee's desire for privacy, Bell County reserves the right to without permission or notices search an employee's desk, work area, locker, cabinet, vehicle, computer or other County-owned equipment or facility. Additionally, when issues of safety, security, theft, or violation of County policy occur, Bell County may request cooperation of employees in any investigation. Failure of an employee to cooperate with an investigation is grounds for discharge.

### **213 Dress Code and Grooming**

Bell County employees are expected to dress in clothing that is in good taste, modest, neat, clean, and appropriate for his or her position and dress safely for the job. Different departments in the county have various requirements for dress. Check with the department head or elected official for more detailed information about department dress expectations

### **214 Excessive Absences and Tardiness**

An essential function of every job and an expectation from every department head, elected official, and supervisor is that Bell County employees are absent as little as possible. Bell County expects you to consistently report for work on a daily basis and on time. Those who are excessively absent or tardy for any reason may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including discharge.

### **215 Employee Complaints**

Employees may bring informal complaints about any work-related condition to the attention of his or her supervisor or Human Resources Director. Employees may file formal complaints only about the following: 1) demotions, 2) termination of employment, 3) improper dismissal, 4) transfer, 5) suspension from work, and 6) violations of Bell County's discrimination or harassment policies

Even though the filing of formal grievances is limited as set above, the County encourages employees to informally resolve other employment issues within the employee's department. If the problem cannot be first resolved within the department, employees are encouraged to seek the assistance of the Human Resources Director.

## **Grievance Procedures**

- **Grievance Level 1**

An employee may file a formal grievance by submitting the grievance in writing to the employee's department head within five (5) working days of the complained of action. The department head has five (5) working days to issue a written reply to the employee and issue a copy to the Human Resources Director. If the employee feels the grievance has not been resolved satisfactorily and is not satisfied with the department head's or elected official's reply, the employee may move to level two of this procedure.

- **Grievance Level 2**

An employee may submit a grievance in written form to the Human Resources Director with a copy of the written reply from the employee's department head or elected official within five (5) working days of receiving the reply. The Human Resources Director will respond in writing to the employee within five (5) working days and provide a copy of the reply to the department, elected official, or County Judge. If the employee feels the HR Director did not resolve the grievance satisfactorily, the employee may move to level three of this procedure.

- **Grievance Level 3**

An employee may submit the grievance in written form to the County Judge, if the employee works for an appointed department head or in written form to the appropriate elected official, if the employee works for an elected official. The grievance must be submitted within five (5) working days after receiving the HR Director's reply under Level 2. The employee must attach copies of the department head/elected official and the HR director's reply. The County Judge or Elected official will make a decision based on the written material supplied by the employee and the appointed official or may provide a hearing for the employee and/or provide a written reply and take appropriate action. The County Judge's decision is final and binding. In the event the employee works for an elected official, the elected official's decision is final and binding.

## **Section 300: Pay policies**

### **300 Mandatory Direct Deposits**

Direct deposit provides a number of benefits, such as avoiding lost checks, and theft or forgery. The payroll office deposits employee paychecks in the employee's account on payday. All employees are required to use direct deposit for payroll unless the payroll office approves an exemption. There are circumstances for which payment by check, rather than direct deposit is necessary or suitable. A direct deposit form must be completed and forwarded to the payroll office along with a voided check, bankcard with account and routing numbers or a letter from your bank with a account number and routing numbers.

### **Exceptions and Exemptions from Mandatory Direct Deposit**

- An employee's first and last paycheck will not be direct deposited
- Bell County will not direct deposit the paycheck of an employee hired for less than 90 days. If Bell County continues employing the individual beyond 90 days, direct deposit is required unless the County grants an exemption.
- Employees may request a hardship exemption on the *application for exemption from payroll direct deposit* form, available in the payroll office, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, Bell County Historic Courthouse.
- Possible exemptions from direct deposit include the employee's inability to have a bank account or the employee is unable to withdraw funds because he or she does not live near or is not employed near a bank. Bell County may consider other exemption requests based on extenuating circumstances.

### **301 Pay Period**

Paychecks are issued on the 15<sup>th</sup> and the last day of every month. If either the 15<sup>th</sup> or the last day of the month should fall on a weekend or a holiday, payday will be the last working day prior to the normal payday. Pay period cutoff times for hours worked, vacation hours and sick leave hours are automated using the Kronos time management system schedule.

### **302 Overtime Compensation**

Nonexempt employees as determined by the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 can either be paid at the rate of time and one-half or receive time and one-half compensatory time off for all time actually worked in excess of 40 hours/week. Salaried employees, for example, some supervisors, department heads, elected officials and others declared exempt from the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 are not eligible for overtime wage.

Supervisors may assign overtime work to meet established schedules or deadlines. Supervisors will attempt to give advance notice to employees whenever possible. However, situations occasionally arise that do not permit advance notification. Overtime rates are applied to actual hours worked on County business and are computed as follows: time worked in excess of 40 hours in one week is paid at the rate of 1.5 of the regular hourly wage of the employee, OR supervisors may grant employees compensatory time off granting 1.5 for every hour worked in excess of 40.

### **303 Reporting Time Worked**

All employees hired for jobs classified as non-exempt must complete accurate weekly time reports showing all time actually worked. This is a record required by regulations, and Bell County uses the time reports to calculate paychecks. At the end of each pay period, the employee and the employee's supervisor should both sign the time record.

### **304 Wage Garnishment**

It is the policy of Bell County to comply with state law, the Child Support Enforcement Program and Title III of the Consumer Protection Act. Title III imposed federal restrictions on state garnishment laws beginning July 1970. No employer may discharge

any employee because the employee's earnings have been subjected to garnishment for *any one indebtedness*, which means a single debt, regardless of the number of times garnishment proceedings are filed for collection.

The Child Support Enforcement programs require that beginning January 1, 1994, employers withhold for child support orders immediately. The law allows for an exception to immediate wage withholding if the court finds good cause, or if both parents agree to another arrangement. The County will receive a notice from the state child support enforcement agency that tells when to begin to withhold, how much to withhold and where to send the money. If you have further questions regarding wage garnishment, please contact your department head, elected official, or the Human Resources Department, 254-933-5111.

### **305 Employees on Call**

Several Bell County departments (maintenance and custodial, road and bridge, and technology services) have employees who are *on call*. Personnel on call are to stay within 30 minutes of Bell County facilities while on call. Hourly employees who respond to a call are to record all time worked in response to the call. Bell County compensates employees who are on call and work above 40 hours in a workweek according to overtime pay rules

Elected officials and department heads **do not** consider *on call* as hours for which the employee will receive pay when the employee is free to engage in activities for his or her own purposes but is required only to inform the department how he or she can be reached or is required to carry a beeper or cell phone. Elected officials and department heads **do** consider *on call* hours worked when employees restrict their personal activities to the extent the employee cannot use this time effectively for his or her own purposes.

### **306 Longevity Pay**

Full-time employees are compensated for longevity. In addition to the base salary, Bell County will pay an additional .5% per month per year of service up to 30 years. Longevity pay starts on the 13<sup>th</sup> month of employment with the County. Any person leaving employment in Bell County for more than 60 consecutive days will lose his or her longevity pay on returning to Bell County employment.

Occasionally, part-time employees become regular full-time employees. If a part time employee does not have a break in service and becomes full-time, his start date as a part-time employee shall be used by the County to determine the employee's eligibility for longevity pay.

### **307 Severance Pay**

Bell County has not established a severance pay program.

### **308 Payroll Deductions**

Deductions from employee wages shall be in accordance with applicable law. When appropriate, the Bell County payroll office will deduct money from an employee's wage

in the following order: Social Security tax; federal income tax; child support, retirement (mandatory) and wage garnishment.

Employees who object to any deductions, such as deductions due to an absence, deductions for a garnishment, or a child support order are to contact the Human Resources Director. Bell County intends to comply with all applicable laws including the Fair Labor Standards Act and will promptly correct any deductions made in error or not permitted by applicable law. Employees must consent in writing to the following deductions:

- Payment of group health and/or dental insurance, life insurance, accident insurance, cancer insurance, disability policies, and lost time policies
- Contributions to a retirement plan

### **309 Workweek; Hours of Work**

The Bell County employees are generally required to work Monday through Friday, from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, or as specified by each department.

## **Section 400 County Funded Employee Benefits; Employee Purchased Benefits**

### **400 Workers' Compensation (County Funded)**

Bell County maintains workers' compensation insurance for its employees. Employees are required to immediately report any on-the-job injury to his or her supervisor. Employees on leave due to a work related injury are to advise the department head or elected official of his or her status at least once per week.

### **401 Paid Health and Dental Coverage (County Funded)**

Bell County provides paid personal health and dental coverage to its full time employees. Full time employees also have the option of purchasing medical and dental insurance from the health insurance provider for dependents including spouse, children, or family coverage.

### **402 Retirees Health and/or Dental Coverage (County/Employee Funded)**

Retirees from Bell County may continue his or her medical and/or dental coverage after retirement. Bell County will pay a portion of the retiree's medical and/or dental insurance premium until he or she is eligible for Medicare benefits at age 65. The retiree is responsible for the portion of the group health insurance and/or dental premium the County does not pay. The County reserves the right to discontinue any payment for retiree health and/or dental coverage at any time because the County considers health and/or dental coverage a benefit and not a retired employee's right.

### **403 Employee-Purchased Insurance (Employee Purchased)**

There are several life insurance plans available to full-time employees at his or her own expense.

- Life Insurance: Any contracts of life insurance are between the insurance company and the insured. Bell County is not responsible for any issues arising between employees and life insurance companies.
- Employee-Purchased Supplemental Insurance: Bell County has several insurance policies available and administered by an outside insurance company. Benefits provided by these policies include coverage for days of work missed due to illness or some other medical issue.

#### **404 Deferred Compensation (Employee Purchased)**

The deferred compensation program allows employees to defer a portion of his or her income. Deferred income will not be taxed until withdrawn, thus lowering the employee's annual taxable income and reducing the employee's annual income tax. Money set aside in deferred accounts, if not withdrawn, can supplement an employee's retirement income or be used for other purposes. Employees may sign up for deferred compensation at any time. Contact the payroll office at 933-5118 if interested. Money in accounts cannot be withdrawn completely unless the employee has retired, resigned, or has employment terminated by Bell County

#### **405 Texas County District Retirement System (County/Employee Funded)**

Bell County participates in the Texas County District Retirement System. The retirement plan is mandatory for full-time employees. The County withholds 7% of each employee's gross pay every pay period. That money is the employee's contribution to his or her retirement. At the same time, Bell County contributes to the employee's retirement at a rate which varies from year-to-year. The amount the County contributes to the employee's retirement annuity may vary from year to year.

Employees who terminate employment with Bell County before reaching retirement eligibility may withdraw the amount they contributed to the retirement plan. Employees cannot withdraw any amount contributed by the County for the employee unless the employee decides to retire and is fully eligible. Then, the employee retrieves both his or her own contribution and the County contribution through monthly retirement payments.

### **Section 500: Employee Leaves and Absences**

#### **500 Sick Leave and Discretionary Days**

Bell County provides a generous sick leave and flexible leave benefit to all full time, regular employees. Thus, sick leave and discretionary leave from Bell County is a benefit, not a right. If a supervisor concludes that an employee is abusing his or her sick leave or discretionary leave benefits, he or she may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including discharge. Employees may take sick or discretionary leave in hourly and ¼-hour increments subject to prior approval of the employee's supervisor. The rate of accrual is 120 hours (15 days) sick leave in a calendar year. No more than 960 hours (120 days) of accrued sick and discretionary leave may be carried forward from

one calendar year to the next. Bell County does not compensate employees for unused sick leave upon termination of employment or retirement.

Of the leave hours earned, an employee may, with prior approval of his or her supervisor, use up to 40 hours (five days) per year as discretionary time off to take care of personal business. The County charges discretionary leave against your accrued sick leave. Discretionary leave is limited to three consecutive days and you may not take discretionary leave before or after holidays without department approval.

### **501 Notification of Absence**

Regular and reliable attendance is important to the overall operation of each department. If, for any reason, an employee cannot avoid being absent or tardy, he or she shall notify his or her immediate supervisor within a reasonable time before his or her starting time. Bell County defines reasonable as soon as possible but at least one hour prior to reporting time. Different departments within the County have various notification rules. Contact the elected official or department head of your department for specific information.

### **502 Return to Work after Illness**

A medical excuse from a medical professional is required when absent for three consecutive days. However, ***department heads and elected officials at their discretion may require medical certification from a medical professional for each absence depending on the employee's past absence history.***

### **503 Medical Appointments**

If employees have scheduled medical appointments during working hours, the employee's supervisor must approve the medical appointment absence in advance. Employees must provide documentation to his or her supervisor verifying the medical appointment. Employees should return to work the same day as the appointment, if the appointment is for less than ½ day.

### **504 Family Illnesses**

At times, an employee's immediate family members become ill. Employees may use any unused sick or discretionary leave days to care for a spouse, child, or parent. In some instances, immediate supervisors may require documentation from a medical professional either before or after the absence.

### **505 Sick Leave Pool**

Bell County provides an employee sick leave pool. The purpose of the pool is to provide employees access to paid medical leave in the event of a catastrophic illness, injury or temporary disability that prevents employees from reporting to work after all accrued time (vacation, sick leave, comp time, holidays earned) has been exhausted.

- **Eligibility, enrolling, and request process**

Regular, full-time employees, who have 12 months of continuous employment, are eligible to join the sick leave pool. If you wish to be eligible to use time from the sick leave pool, you must contribute a minimum of 24 hours (three days) of unused sick leave, discretionary leave or vacation days to the pool during the preceding calendar year. Those who do not contribute are not eligible to receive benefits from the pool; no exceptions. You will have an opportunity to contribute to the pool during December of each year. You may enroll in the employee sick leave pool by contacting the Human Resources or the payroll office in December of each year.

Contributing members may apply for sick leave pool days so long as the employee has joined the pool, has used all accrued leave time, sick leave, discretionary leave, compensatory time, holidays earned and vacation time. Also, to apply for days from the sick leave pool, the employee's condition must fit the County's definition of *catastrophic*. Employees may apply for additional sick leave from the pool through the Human Resources Department, 254-933-5118.

An employee committee administers the sick leave pool. The committee may grant an employee up to 90-days of leave in ten-day increments. The committee may choose to waive the ten-day increment rule and award up to 90 days, depending on the circumstances. Due to HIPAA rules, requesting employee's names are confidential and not revealed to the committee administering the sick leave pool and requesting employees may not appear in person before the committee.

- **Definition of catastrophic illness, injury, which qualifies an employee for days from the sick leave pool**

Illnesses or injuries Bell County recognizes as conditions that qualify employees for receiving days from the sick leave pool include catastrophic illnesses or injuries, which are terminal, life-threatening, or severe medical conditions or a combination of conditions affecting the mental or physical health of the employee. Examples of qualifying events include but are not limited to

- Strokes with residual paralysis or weakness
- Incapacitating heart attack or stroke
- Major surgery such as hysterectomies, mastectomies, heart bypass surgery
- Debilitating cancer
- Hepatitis
- Car wreck requiring hospitalization
- Broken hip

Examples of medical events that do not qualify include but are not limited to

- Broken limbs
- Colds and allergies

- Minor surgery with no complications such as appendectomy, tonsillectomy, day surgery
- Pregnancy with minor or no complications
- Carpal tunnel syndrome

Contributing members may not use days from the catastrophic sick leave pool to care for family members.

### **Appeals**

A member may appeal the committee's decision in writing. If a member requests an appeal, the committee will respond to the employee's appeal in writing within ten (10) working days after receipt of the written appeal. The committee's decision is final.

### **506 Bereavement Leave**

Bell County grants up to three (3) days leave with pay to employees to attend services in connection with the loss a member of the employee's immediate family. For purposes of this policy, immediate family means spouse, child, parent, brother, sister, aunt, uncle grandparent, or grandchild. In addition, immediate family includes any of the following of spouse of the employee: children, parent, brother, sister, grandparent, grandchild, aunt or uncle.

### **507 Funeral Leave for Non-Family Members**

Bell County allows employees time off with pay, up to a maximum of four (4) hours, to attend the funeral of a relative or friend who is not a member of the employee's immediate family.

### **508 Additional Bereavement Leave**

Employees may request time off for bereavement beyond the amounts set out in Policy Nos. 506 and 507. Those requests may only be granted by department heads or elected officials. If approved, the payroll office shall deduct hours from the employee's available accrued vacation, discretionary or compensatory time. In the event the employee does not have any accrued time, the department head or elected official may approve additional time off, but the time shall be unpaid.

### **509 Family and Medical Leave (FMLA)**

Full time employees with at least 12 months of continuous employment with Bell County and who have worked at least 1,250 hours in the period immediately preceding a request for leave are eligible to take up to twelve (12) weeks of unpaid leave for various reasons. Family Medical Leave may be taken for:

1. Birth of a child;
2. Placement of a child for adoption or foster care;
3. Care of the employee's spouse, child or parent with a serious health condition; or

4. Inability of the employee to work based on a serious health condition.

Employees who must take time off to care for a covered service member with a serious illness or injury are eligible for additional leave. All employees may be required to use accrued paid leave time concurrently with time off taken under FMLA. For questions relating to eligibility for FMLA leave, please contact your department head, elected official, or the Human Resources Department at 254-933-5111 for further information.

**Jury Duty**

Serving on a jury is considered a civic duty, and Bell County encourages employees to serve. Employees are required to notify his or her immediate supervisor as soon as he receives a jury summons, a subpoena, or other witness notice. Employees will be paid at their regular rate of pay for time spent for jury service. Employees are required to report to work when released from court duty, and the court no longer requires their presence. Documentation of jury service must be provided upon the employee’s return to work at the end of jury service.

**511 Military Leave**

Bell County grants leave to its employees for military service in accordance with all applicable state and federal regulations relating to military and uniformed service leave.

**512 Inclement Weather Closings**

Even in severe weather, it may be necessary for Bell County employees to report to work to ensure that proper service is available to members of the public. All employees should report to work as normal unless the County Judge, in conjunction with department heads and elected officials, determines that County offices will not open. Notices of closings and delayed openings as made by the County Judge will be communicated on local TV channels, radio stations and on Bell County’s website. Notwithstanding instructions to report to work, employees should always exercise due care for their safety and should not report to work if doing so would create an unreasonable or unacceptable risk.

**513 Paid Holidays**

Approved paid holidays:

New Year’s Day	Martin Luther King’s Birthday	President’s Day
Good Friday	Memorial Day	Independence Day
Labor Day	Columbus Day	Veteran’s Day
Thanksgiving Days	Christmas Day	

## Holiday pay

- Bell County pays its full-time employees at a regular rate of pay if the holiday falls within the employee's normal working schedule.
- To be eligible for holiday pay, an employee must work the regularly scheduled workday preceding the holiday and day following the holiday.
- Department heads and elected officials may grant exceptions to this policy at their discretion.
- Employees accrue holidays only if receiving a paycheck
- Employees who are on an unpaid leave of absence will not earn holiday pay if the holiday occurs during the leave of absence.

## 514 Vacations and Vacation Accrual

- New employees accrue vacation during the first calendar year of employment and are eligible to use earned vacation during the following calendar year
- For the first five (5) years of employment, employees accrue 80 hours (10 days) of vacation in each year, and those hours may be taken in the following calendar year.  
After five years of employment, employees accrue 120 hours (15 days) vacation in each year, and those hours may be taken in the following calendar year.

### First year accrual

First year hire date	Days Accrued (eligible to take after January 1 of new year)
If hired during October, November or December	2 days vacation accrued
If hired during July, August or September	4 days vacation accrued
If hired during April, May or June	6 days vacation accrued
If hired during January, February or March	8 days vacation accrued

- **Unused vacation time**  
Unused vacation time not taken during a calendar year does not roll over and accrue for the next calendar year.
- **Pay for unused vacation**  
Employees who terminate their employment with Bell County will receive pay for unused days up to 120 hours (15days if eligible).

- **Break in service**

Any employee who leaves Bell County employment for more than sixty (60) consecutive days (except military leave) will lose credit for all prior years of service for purpose of calculating accrual of vacation days.

### **515 Volunteer Emergency Service Leave**

Any employee who is a member of an emergency service organization, (for example fire, auxiliary police, medical, ambulance, or search and rescue) must inform the department head or elected official with whom he or she works. Details regarding paid time off for volunteer emergency services are available through the employee's department head, elected official, or the Human Resources Department. Department Heads and Elected Officials may at his or her discretion grant up to five (5) paid days for volunteer emergency service providing the employee can document each event

## **Section 600 Safety and Security**

### **600 Equipment Maintenance and Operation**

It is the employee's responsibility to check equipment to ensure its proper operation as well as to report promptly any maintenance needed. It is also the employee's responsibility to follow established procedures and rules as required by each department.

### **601 Industry and Safety Code Standards**

Employees must comply with all County and industry safety standards:

- Bell County prohibits reckless or careless driving and operation of County vehicles and equipment
- Every employee will keep his or her work area(s) clean and move all scrap, trash and other clutter to a designated location
- Employees who violate safety regulations may receive a disciplinary warning, suspension with or without pay or termination of employment, depending on the seriousness of the violation. Employees are expected to report any hazardous conditions, work procedures or other unsafe situations to his or her immediate supervisor.
- Employees who do not have on the protective gear required of them should not begin work
- Employees who fail to dress appropriately or wear necessary protective equipment are in violation of County policy, which may result in discipline or termination of employment.

### **602 Protective Equipment**

Different departments may require employees to use protective equipment, which includes but is not limited to masks, gloves, goggles, and safety shields. Employees required to wear safety or protective equipment should notify his or her supervisor if any required equipment is not available.

### **603 Reporting Accidents**

Employees must report all accidents or injuries immediately, regardless of severity, to a supervisor, department head, elected official, the Human Resources office, or the County Auditor's office. Failure to promptly report an accident is a violation of Bell County policy and may result in disciplinary action.

Employees **driving County-owned vehicles** must report any vehicular accident to the police and to a supervisor before leaving the scene of the accident, except when leaving for necessary emergency medical treatment.

### **604 Visitors in the Workplace**

Each department has formal or informal rules relating to visitors in work areas. Bell County defines a visitor as a person who is not a customer or employee on duty in that department at the time of the visit, but one who visits in the employee work or break areas. It is the responsibility of the supervisor or department head or elected official to make certain that visitors in the department, whether employees or not, are authorized to be there. Employees are to notify a supervisor, department head or elected official if a person(s) is in a work area normally reserved for employees only. In case of doubt, the supervisor should ask visitors for identification

### **605 Drugs and Alcohol**

To help ensure a safe, healthy, and productive drug-free work environment for the employees of Bell County and others on County property, to protect County property and assets, to maintain a favorable public image, and to ensure efficient operations, the County has adopted a policy on drugs, alcohol, and other prohibited items.

It is the policy of the County to provide a drug-free work environment that is both safe for our employees, as well as others having business with the County or are on County property and conducive to efficient and productive work standards. This policy restricts employees from reporting to work under the influence of alcohol, illegal drugs, or any prescription or over-the-counter drugs, which may, in any way, impair the functioning of an employee.

### **606 Reporting Security Violations**

County officials cannot handle security issues and violations constructively unless they are aware of the issues. Employees are encouraged to report security-related incidents so that County officials can take appropriate action in a timely manner. To report security violations, contact your department head, elected official or immediate supervisor.

### **607 Emergencies**

#### **Tornados or violent weather**

In the event of a tornado or other violent weather, employees are urged to remain indoors. If employees are in a multi-story building, he or she should gather at the center of the first floor or basement (when available), avoiding windows. When warning sirens sound, take shelter immediately and wait until the storm passes.

## **Fire**

Each department in the County should have someone appointed as building fire warden. In multi-storied buildings, there should be at least one person designated on each floor. In the event of a fire, it is the fire warden's responsibility to instruct employees to follow exit procedures established for each building. Employees are not to use elevators in multi-storied buildings in the event of a fire. Department heads and elected officials should designate one or more employees to assist handicapped employees in a fire evacuation. Once outside, employees should gather in a pre-designated spot for roll call.

## **Section 700 County equipment usage**

### **700 Computers, Network, and Internet Usage**

Bell County computers and computer systems, including e-mail and internet access, is the property of Bell County and is being provided exclusively for work-related purposes. All use of Bell County computers, e-mail, internet access and systems is provided subject to Bell County rules, regulation and review. Bell County does not maintain these rights for the purpose of unduly intruding into communications or activities of employees, but does so in order to protect Bell County, its property and its interests and those of its employees. Use of Bell County's computer systems, including e-mail and internet access is subject to the following guidelines:

1. Employees shall take all reasonable steps and precautions to ensure the security and integrity of the County's computer system(s) and all information contained therein. For these reasons, employees are prohibited from, without specific authorization, downloading items or installing items on Bell County computers, equipment or devices. Also, employees should take reasonable steps to safeguard and protect passwords and access codes, including, employees should never share his or her password with others. Employees shall be responsible for all actions taken using his or passwords or access information.
2. All material maintained on the County Computers or obtained or sent through the County e-mail system and the access to the Internet provided by the County is subject to being reviewed by the County, and employees should not maintain any information on County computers or receive or send e-mail messages or other materials which they do not want reviewed.
3. It is not intended that incidental personal use of the computers, the e-mail system and the access to the Internet provided by the County is to be entirely prohibited. However, use of County Computers, the County e-mail system or internet access by an employee for personal purposes must not interfere with the employee's job or distract others. For that reason, the County reserves the right to instruct any or all employees to discontinue all

personal use of the County computers, the e-mail system and internet access.

4. Employees are strictly prohibited from receiving or sending e-mail messages or other materials and/or maintaining files on any County computer of a harassing, intimidating, offensive or discriminatory nature. Such conduct, or any other conduct in violation of this policy, may result in immediate dismissal or other disciplinary measures. E-mail messages and all other Internet and computer use is subject to the County's other policies including sexual harassment and harassment generally.
5. Bell County is responsible for securing its network and computing system in a reasonable and economically feasible manner against unauthorized access and/or abuse, while making them accessible for authorized and legitimate users. Responsibility includes informing users of expected standards of conduct and punitive measures for non-compliance. Any attempt to violate the provisions of Bell County's computer, network and internet usage policy will result in disciplinary action through temporary revocation of user accounts, regardless of the success or failure of the attempt. The users of the network are responsible for respecting and adhering to local, state, federal and international law. Any attempt to break those laws using the network may result in litigation against the offender by the proper authorities. If such an event should occur, Bell County will fully comply with the authorities to provide any information necessary for the litigation process.

#### **General computing policy**

- Once an employee receives a user ID to access the network and computer systems on the network, he or she is responsible for all actions taken while using that user ID
- Bell County prohibits use of County owned computers for commercial purposes or personal gain.

#### **Electronic mail policy**

Whenever employees send electronic mail, the employee's name and user ID are included in each mail message. Employees are responsible for all electronic mail originating from the employee's user ID.

#### **Network security policy**

As users of the network, employees may access other networks and/or the computer systems attached to those networks. Therefore:

- Bell County prohibits using systems and/or networks in attempts to gain unauthorized access to remote systems
- Bell County prohibits using systems and/or networks to connect to other systems
- Bell County prohibits copying of system files

- Bell County prohibits copying of copyrighted materials, such as third-party software, without the express written permission of the owner or proper license
- All employees need to take steps to avoid any operations which introduce or create a high risk of introducing viruses or disruptive and destructive programs into the County's network or into external networks.

### **Internet policy**

Internet access is provided to employees as a tool to make job performance easier and timelier.

- Employees are prohibited from displaying or accessing any sexually explicit documents or websites. The act is considered a violation of the sexual harassment policy
- Each employee using the Internet facilities of the County shall identify her/himself honestly, accurately and completely
- Employees with Internet access may not use County Internet facilities to download entertainment software or games, or to play games against opponents over the Internet.
- An Internet firewall has been installed to assure the safety and security of the County's networks. Any employee who attempts to disable, defeat, or circumvent any County security facility will be subject to immediate dismissal.
- Employees are not to use County computers to operate a business or to earn money from another entity.

### **Acknowledgment of receiving computer use policy**

All employees with a computer user ID when signing an acknowledgement of receiving and having read this employee handbook and the computer use handbook are agreeing to County rules about Internet usage.

### **701 County-Owned Vehicles**

To ensure safe operation of Bell County-owned vehicles, employees who drive Bell County vehicles are to adhere to the following policies and usage rules. Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.

### **Compliance with traffic and related laws**

All employees are expected to operate Bell County vehicles in a courteous and reasonable manner with due regard for all applicable law and safety considerations , All employees driving County-owned vehicles and equipment will use seat belts, shoulder harnesses, or other safety devices. Vehicle drivers are responsible for advising passengers of the need to use the seat belt and shoulder harnesses. Bell County requires drivers of County vehicles to be physically and mentally capable of operating any County owned vehicle or County equipment when required to do so.

### **Alcohol and intoxication**

Employees may not operate a County-owned vehicle within eight hours of consuming any alcohol. Employees taking a prescription or over-the-counter medication, which may affect their ability to drive, will not drive. Employees may never take illegal drugs and

operate a vehicle. Bell County will immediately discharge any employee who violates this policy.

### **Defensive driving training**

Each new employee will successfully complete an on-line defensive driving course prior to receiving authorization to operate a County vehicle. Current employees must successfully complete the four-hour, on-line defensive driving course every two years to maintain driving privileges of County-owned vehicles.

### **Accident reports**

County vehicle drivers involved in an accident must fully cooperate with any investigation by authorized personnel into an investigation of the accident. Any employee who drives a County vehicle and who is arrested or charged with a motor vehicle offense that results in suspension or revocation of the employee's driver's license, must notify his or supervisor immediately or as soon as possible, but in no case later than 24 hours after the accident occurs. Conviction for such an offense may be grounds for loss of county vehicle driving privileges and/or further disciplinary action.

### **Transporting passengers and family members**

Authorized drivers of Bell County vehicles may not transport any persons not specifically authorized to be in the vehicle and who are not engaged in official duties or business for the County. Due to insurance policy restrictions, authorized county vehicle drivers may not transport family members in a county owned vehicle.

### **702 Personal Use of County Owned Telephones (Not Official Business)**

The following rules apply for employee use of County-owned telephones and equipment:

- Employees may never call 900 numbers
- Employees may not use the County phone system to make harassing calls
- Personal calls may be made or received by employees but must be limited and must not interfere with the employee's official duties
- Personal calls resulting in charges to the County are not allowed, except in a bona fide emergency and with authorization of the department head or elected official.

### **County issued cell phones, beeper, and pagers**

Bell County provides cell phones, beepers, and pagers to designated employees for conducting County business efficiently and effectively. Bell County may discipline employees for using those devices in manner that is not consistent with Bell County business or for any use or purpose, which is improper. Rules which should be followed and/or uses which are improper include but are limited to the following:

- County employees authorized to drive a County owned vehicle are encouraged not to use cell phones while driving. If an employee receives or has a need to make a call while driving a county owned vehicle, the employee should stop the vehicle in a safe area to send or receive phone calls. Bell County prohibits any use of written messaging, including text-messaging while driving.

- Employees are not to use beepers, pagers, or cell phones for any illegal activity, including harassment

**Elected officials and department heads should remind his or her employees that all County-paid devices (computers, phones, etc.) are provided to employees for official business and any information sent or contained on them is subject to have to be produced under the Open Records Act.**