

Effective: 23rd January 2013

Issue No. 3

Electronic Communication

1. INTRODUCTION

Electronic communication includes e-mail systems, instant messaging systems and web-based collaborative networking sites. This policy applied to any electronic communication of information held or maintained by NERC, any systems and/or equipment used to store, process and transmit information. The scope covers the electronic communication and storage of any NERC business-related message, whether or not it is owned by NERC.

This notice explains how electronic communication should be used. It explains what users are allowed to do and what they should not do. It applies to temporary and permanent staff, students and fellows.

While this notice focuses on electronic communication, much of it applies equally to NERC's other methods of communicating with the outside world such as letter, fax and telephone.

Misuse of electronic messaging may result in legal claims being made against NERC and individual staff and may lead to disciplinary action being taken, including dismissal.

It is important staff read this policy carefully. If there is anything that is not understood it is the responsibility of the staff member to ask their line manager or local HR to explain.

2. POLICY OBJECTIVE

To inform staff of what is considered appropriate and inappropriate use of the organisations e-mail system and what the possible outcomes are for misusing the system.

3. ASSOCIATED POLICIES

Discipline Policy No. 6.2

Provision of Advice Policy No. 1.3

RCUK, Acceptable Use Policy for Information & Communication Systems and Services

4. POLICY CONTENTS

- Personal Use
- Monitoring
- Privacy
- Sending Messages
- Security
- Using Social Media
- Inappropriate Use
- What is my mail address?

5. PERSONAL USE

NERC's computer systems are for business use. Occasional and reasonable personal use is permitted provided that this does not interfere with the performance of official duties.

When sending a personal e-mail, ensure that it is clear that it is personal. For example, start or sign off the e-mail with the following statement:

This e-mail is personal. It is not authorised by or sent on behalf of NERC and is the personal responsibility of the sender.

6. MONITORING

Within NERC e-mail will not normally be read by anyone other than the individual sending it and the correspondents. However, NERC reserve the right to intercept mail at any time if there is evidence of abuse or misuse of the computing facilities or other transgressions against the Code of Conduct.

Less intrusively, system logs may be examined routinely to detect misuse of the facilities. These normally show the sender, recipient and subject of the messages without revealing their content - similar to itemised telephone bills.

Similar considerations apply to systems other than e-mail, for example use of the World Wide Web; logs may be examined routinely and detailed examination may take place if abuse is suspected.

7. PRIVACY

Do not expect any message sent or received to be private.

Although the contents of messages will not normally be read by anyone other than the sender and the correspondents they should be treated as no more secure than messages written on postcards as:

- communications over the Internet and NERC's internal networks pass through multiple computer systems where they may be intercepted and read by system administrators;
- messages which have been misaddressed or which fail because of a technical problem are often delivered to a system's postmaster, who must look at them to determine what to do with them;
- messages may be monitored or intercepted within NERC. They may also be monitored or intercepted within your correspondents' organisations.

To help safeguard privacy it is suggested that users mark any personal e-mails that they send with the word 'Personal' or 'Private' in the subject line and to ask those they correspond with to similarly mark any personal emails being sent.

8. SENDING MESSAGES

- Consider the needs and capabilities of the recipient:
- Never amend messages received.
- Do not impersonate any other person when sending messages.

- When communicating with others outside NERC, observe the rules in policy 1.3 - Provision of Advice.
- Consider, before sending an e-mail, how you it would be perceived if the message was made public. Messages may have to be disclosed in response to Freedom of Information Act requests or in litigation.

9. SECURITY

- Unless staff are using encryption, they should assume that e-mail is not secure enough for confidential matters. Never put in a mail message anything that could not be put on a postcard. (See section 7, Privacy)
- Staff should never send their password in an e-mail.
- Be careful about acting upon unexpected information or instructions received through e-mail; the sender's address may be forged.
- Obtain confirmation of receipt for important messages sent.
- Be careful with files received in e-mail, particularly from unfamiliar correspondents. Even an apparently simple file might harbour a virus. Scan all such files on receipt.

10. USING SOCIAL MEDIA

NERC recognises that social networking can aid its business by enabling collaboration and interaction. New online collaboration systems are fundamentally changing the way NERC staff work and engage with each other and their stakeholders, including the public. NERC supports responsible involvement in this rapidly growing online community as do many Government Departments.

- Do not comment in any official capacity on NERC business unless it is part of your job or you have specific authorisation from senior management.
- Social networking is no different to any other form of business communication and is governed by existing legislation alongside NERC policies and guidance. Any misuse will be governed by NERC disciplinary procedures.
- Be aware of your association with NERC in online social networks. Identify yourself as a NERC employee, and ensure your profile and related content is consistent with how you already present yourself to colleagues and stakeholders at work.
- You are personally responsible for any NERC-related content you publish on blogs, wikis or any other form of user-generated media. What you publish will be public for a very long time – so protect your privacy and reputation, and those of others.
- Respect privacy, copyright, fair use, security, data protection and disclosure laws. Don't provide NERC's or any 3rd party's confidential or proprietary information. Ask permission from your line manager before you publish or report on anything which you think may be sensitive – if in doubt don't do it.
- Don't officially cite or reference any 3rd parties in relation to NERC without their approval. When you do, if possible, link back to the source.

- Try to add value – social networking is an excellent way to show off our science. NERC is best represented by its staff and their renowned independent expertise, and what you publish may reflect on NERC's reputation and business.

11. INAPPROPRIATE USE

- NERC's computing facilities must not be used to send messages or distribute material which might reasonably cause offence or which would be considered socially unacceptable. Direct links to such material in published electronic documents is also prohibited.
- The deliberate transmission or import of material which is threatening, offensive, obscene, or which constitutes racial or sexual harassment will be considered a serious misuse of NERC facilities. Staff found to be responsible for the generation, transmission or distribution of such materials will be dealt with through NERC disciplinary procedures and, in extreme cases, may be liable to summary dismissal. See policies 12.1 Dignity at Work and 12.2 Equal Opportunities.

REVISION HISTORY

Issue	Description of Change	Date
1	To replace policy SN5/00. Revision to layout and minor word changes.	10 th August 2009
2	Revision incorporating NERC IST Electronic Communications Policy	12 th June 2012
3	Minor revision to section 10 and Appendix A	23 rd January 2013

Date of Next Planned Revision:	January 2014
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	Revised	Responsible	Authorised
Department	Corporate HR/IST	Corporate HR/IST	Head of Corporate HR
Name	David Hyett	David Hyett	S Allsopp
Signature			

Annex A

Forms of e-mail address

When using e-mail it is essential that the e-mail address staff give is correct. Most NERC staff who use e-mail can be mailed using addresses of the form -

username@nerc.ac.uk
or *name@nerc.ac.uk*

Where *username* is the username normally used to login to the computer and *name* may be any reasonable combination of first-name, initials and surname provided it is unambiguous (the surname alone is not sufficient). Username is recommended. While name based addresses are currently available, their future availability cannot be guaranteed.

For example -

chado@nerc.ac.uk
C.Dodgson@nerc.ac.uk
C.L.Dodgson@nerc.ac.uk
Charles.Dodgson@nerc.ac.uk

Charles.L.Dodgson@nerc.ac.uk

All these are aliases for the *actual* mailbox address which is likely to be something like chado@nerc.ac.uk, chado@pcmail.nerc-bas.ac.uk or chado@exchange.bgs.ac.uk, depending on which mail system is used.

NERC staff are strongly advised to give the *username@nerc.ac.uk* form of address on business stationery (staff in Centres, Surveys & Laboratories see the note below).

Although it has been common to use the C.Dodgson@nerc.ac.uk form, this should be avoided, because if there are 2 C Dodgson's within the organisation the address becomes ambiguous. This means that any message sent with an address in that format cannot be delivered as the system doesn't know which C Dodgson to direct it to. It is not as common that a form such as Charles.Dodgson@nerc.ac.uk becomes ambiguous but it may happen and on that basis should be avoided.

The *username@nerc.ac.uk* form of address will always be unambiguous.

Reasons for other forms of e-mail address

They are provided so that someone who doesn't know a username but does know a name can take a guess at an e-mail address and have a reasonable chance of success. If they happen to guess an address that turns out to be ambiguous they will receive an error message that tells them the address is ambiguous and offers several related but unambiguous addresses for them to choose from.

Always check

Staff should always check that any form of e-mail address they are providing for correspondence works. It is common to be known by an abbreviated form of a first name (ie Charlie instead of Charles), however, it is likely that the mail system will have been populated with the full name. Staff can check that their chosen form of address works by sending themselves a message. Staff are also advised to look their e-mail addresses up in the NERC Directory.

Research Centre Domains

Although all NERC staff have nerc.ac.uk mail addresses, Research Centres also have their own specific mail domains and Research Centre staff should normally use them in preference to nerc.ac.uk. The advice about using the *username* in preference to a real name still applies:

Centre / Survey	Mail Domain
British Antarctic Survey	bas.ac.uk
British Geological Survey	bgs.ac.uk
Centre for Ecology and Hydrology	ceh.ac.uk
National Oceanography Centre	noc.ac.uk