

Pentagon adopts new cellphone restrictions

May 22 2018, by Lolita C. Baldor



In this June 3, 2011, file photo, the Pentagon is seen from air from Air Force One. The Defense Department has approved new restrictions for the use of cellphones and some other electronic devices in the Pentagon where classified information is present or discussed. But officials stopped far short of imposing an all-out ban. (AP Photo/Charles Dharapak, File)

After months of debate, the Defense Department approved Monday new restrictions for the use of cellphones and some other electronic devices in the Pentagon where classified information is present or discussed. But officials stopped far short of imposing an all-out ban.

The memo, which was obtained by The Associated Press, largely clarifies current procedures and calls for stricter adherence to long-held practices that require phones be left in storage containers outside secure areas where sensitive matters are discussed. But it makes clear that cellphones can still be used in common areas and other offices in the Pentagon if classified information is not present.

The memo was signed by Deputy Secretary Patrick Shanahan. Pentagon officials said they do not yet have a cost estimate for the construction of storage areas where the phones can be left without creating a threat to security.

"In this day and age, with the level of threat-based technologies, most of those devices should never get anywhere near a classified workspace," Garry Reid, the Pentagon's director for defense intelligence, told The Associated Press in an interview. "We know that mobile wireless devices have recording capabilities and cameras and it's not appropriate for those to be in secure workspaces. So we have to put control procedures in place."

More than 25,000 people work in the Pentagon, ranging from Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and the Joint Chiefs of Staff to restaurant workers and cleaning crews, and many use their phones for family emergencies and other needs.

Fitness trackers that don't have wireless or cellular technology or contain microphones are not covered by the memo, but will be addressed in a separate policy that is still being developed by defense officials. And medical devices with cellular technology must be approved on an individual basis.

The memo covers "laptops, tablets, cellular phones, smartwatches, and other devices" that are portable, can wirelessly transmit information and

have "a self-contained power source."

The technology reviews were launched in late January after revelations that fitness trackers and other electronic devices can be used to pinpoint troop locations, military bases and other sensitive areas and can be tracked on an interactive, online map.

The Global Heat Map, published by the GPS tracking company Strava, uses satellite information to map the locations of subscribers to Strava's fitness service. The map showed activity from 2015 through September 2017, and scattered areas in warzones such as Iraq and Syria were illuminated, suggesting they could pinpoint military or government personnel using fitness trackers.

Published stories about the heat map raised concerns in the Pentagon, setting off lengthy reviews on the use of all electronic devices. Initial fears that the department would ban cellphones in the massive five-sided building were not realized. But the memo makes clear that secure areas must have storage containers located outside the room, and that mobile devices must be turned off and placed inside the box.

There will be random security inspections in classified areas and violators will be punished—including with the possible loss of their security clearance or access to the Pentagon.

The new rules, which take effect immediately and must be fully implemented within six months, are likely to trigger the installation of more large, metal, multi-sectioned lock-boxes for phones.

For years, rolling wooden containers with multiple slots for phones have been used around the building, including in the hall outside the Tank—the Joint Staff's conference room on the Pentagon's E Ring, where senior leaders routinely meet and hold secure video-conferences.

Those are not likely to be used as much due to fire safety and other potential evacuation concerns.

The size and complexity of the Pentagon workforce—which includes thousands of commuters, and a wide range of employees, including some who may occasionally work from home, contributed to the lengthy deliberations over the plan.

"You can start out saying no phones in the building at all," said Reid. But he said the discussions eventually centered on how to set up effective and pragmatic restrictions on mobile devices in classified areas. "The Pentagon is a bit of a unique environment - where you have everything from public tours to varying levels of classified workspaces."

Throughout the day, workers can be seen huddled in unclassified or non-secure areas near doorways, in the courtyard or in outer-ring offices where they can get a wireless signal and make calls or scroll through emails.

The memo allows for a variety of exceptions. For example, some senior officials have government-issued mobile devices, and those can be approved for use in secure spaces if the camera, microphone and wireless capabilities can be disabled. Exceptions won't be granted for personal phones.

The policy doesn't apply to any devices that have minimal storage and transmission capabilities such as key fobs used for medical alert, motor vehicles or home security systems.

© 2018 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Pentagon adopts new cellphone restrictions (2018, May 22) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-05-pentagon-cellphone-restrictions.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.