

DOGE

# DOGE will use AI to assess the responses of federal workers who were told to justify their jobs via email

The revelation comes as federal workers face a midnight deadline to respond.



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**By Courtney Kube, Julie Tsirkin, Yamiche Alcindor, Laura Strickler and Dareh Gregorian**

WASHINGTON – Responses to the Elon Musk-directed [email to government employees](#) about what work they had accomplished in the last week are expected to be fed into an artificial intelligence system to determine whether those jobs are necessary, according to three sources with knowledge of the system.

The information will go into an LLM (Large Language Model), an advanced AI system that looks at huge amounts of text data to understand, generate and process human language, the sources said. The AI system will determine whether someone's work is mission-critical or not.

The U.S. Office of Personnel Management emails were sent to federal workers on Saturday, shortly after [Musk wrote in a post on X](#) that "all federal employees will shortly receive an email requesting to understand what they got done last week. Failure to respond will be taken as a resignation."

The OPM email did not mention the resignation threat, but said: "Please reply to this email with approx. 5 bullets of what you accomplished last week and cc your manager. Please do not send any classified information, links, or attachments. Deadline is this Monday at 11:59pm EST."

The reason the email requested no links or attachments was because of the plan to send the information to the AI system, the sources said.

A request for comment from OPM as to whether humans will be involved in reviewing the responses was not answered immediately. The White House declined to comment.

But in response to a tweet about the usage of LLMs, Musk wrote on X that they were not "needed here," and "this was basically a check to see if the employee had a pulse and was capable of replying to an email."

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After the deadline for employees to reply to the email had passed late Monday, OPM did not immediately respond to a request for comment regarding how many workers replied and how many were required to do so.

In an email to its workforce earlier Monday, the Justice Department said that during a meeting with the interagency Chief Human Capital Officers Council, OPM informed agencies that employee responses to the email are voluntary. OPM also clarified that despite what Musk had posted, not responding to the email does not equate to a resignation, the email said.

Musk complained about backlash to the directive on his [social media platform](#) late Monday.

"The email request was utterly trivial, as the standard for passing the test was to type some words and press send! Yet so many failed even that inane test, urged on in some cases by their managers. Have you ever witnessed such INCOMPETENCE and CONTEMPT for how YOUR TAXES are being spent?" he wrote.

In a subsequent tweet, he seemed to indicate that a second email could be sent to government workers who don't respond to the first one.

"Subject to the discretion of the President, they will be given another chance. Failure to respond a second time will result in termination," he [wrote](#).

The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the post.

The initial directive has faced pushback from unions, workers and even some agencies since it was sent, but the effort was praised by President Donald Trump earlier Monday.

"I thought it was great," [Trump told reporters](#) in the Oval Office, where he was meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron.

"We have people that don't show up to work and nobody even knows if they work for the government, so by asking the question 'tell us what you did this week,' what he's doing is saying are you actually working. And then, if you don't answer, like, you're sort of semi-fired or you're fired," he said, claiming without providing evidence that "a lot of people are not answering because they don't even exist."

"There was a lot of genius in sending it," Trump said. "If people don't respond, it's very possible that there is no such person or they're not working."

A coalition of unions and groups that have been fighting the Trump administration's mass layoffs of probationary workers charge the effort was unlawful. They amended their lawsuit against the U.S. Office of Personnel Management over the weekend to add a claim involving the OPM email directing workers to justify their workweek.

The [lawsuit](#) charges that the administration didn't follow proper procedure for such an order and should be voided by a judge.

"The mass firings ordered by OPM are illegal and betray the trust of countless federal employees. The patronizing demand that federal workers still on the job have to justify themselves by enumerating five accomplishments just adds insult to injury. That too is against the law," lawyer Norm Eisen said in a statement on behalf of the plaintiffs.

Musk has been tasked by Trump with reducing the size of the government, and the email is seen as part of his push to reduce the federal workforce by as much as 10%.

Some agencies, including ones led by close Trump allies, had told their employees to ignore the directive.

Justice Department employees were informed earlier Monday that they did not need to respond to the message, according to emails seen by NBC News. “Due to the confidential and sensitive nature of the Department’s work, DOJ employees do not need to respond to the email from OPM. If you have already responded to this email, no further action is needed,” read one email sent by Assistant Attorney General for Administration Jolene Ann Lauria.

FBI Director [Kash Patel](#) instructed employees over the weekend to “pause any responses” to the email, and said his agency would do its own review. Employees of the State Department, the National Institutes of Health, the Defense Department, the National Security Agency and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence were also told not to respond to the email.

The Department of Agriculture also sent out an unsigned email to employees informing them that any response to the email “is voluntary and not required.”

The email was also sent to an [unknown amount](#) of judicial branch employees, including judges and court staffers. Spokespeople for federal courts in Manhattan and the Northern District of Illinois confirmed to NBC News that “some” people had gotten the message.

Julie Hodek, a spokesperson for the Northern District of Illinois, also confirmed the email and said the court’s chief judge and clerk “communicated with the staff that as we are judiciary employees, our policies and procedures are governed by the Judicial Conference of the United States and our local court HR handbooks.”

A spokesperson for the Southern District of New York said personnel there had been directed not to respond to the email.

Managers within the Environmental Protection Agency on Monday sent employees model responses to the email to make it easier for them.

“As empathy for their staff, they sent examples,” said one agency employee who shared two of the managers’ own responses with NBC News. The employee asked NBC not to publish the managers’ responses in full out of fear of reprisal.

Officials at the Health and Human Services Department and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services directed employees to respond by the deadline. HHS informed employees of OPM’s changed guidance later on Monday, and [warned](#) that whatever information they choose to share may “be read by malign foreign actors.”

An email sent to Department of Transportation employees and obtained by NBC News instructed them to respond to OPM's weekend email asking for five bullet points of their work. The message also asked employees to exclude any classified info from their responses. Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy [embraced the challenge](#) himself in a post on social media.

Musk appears to be following the same playbook he used when he bought Twitter, which he renamed X.

Musk began his tenure there with massive layoffs, asking employees to commit to "Extremely hardcore" work in an email titled "A Fork in the Road" or be fired. The email subject line is the same as the email sent out to federal employees by the Office of Personnel Management offering buyouts in January. About [75,000 federal employees](#) took the deal.

Twitter employees who stayed were then asked to print out pages of code they'd written from the last month and prepare to present the work to Musk personally. The code reviews reportedly were abandoned, and instead, managers were asked to rank their employees, according to [The Verge](#).

Musk and DOGE's access to government data and information has become a central point of friction between the group and its critics. In at least [11 lawsuits](#), plaintiffs have argued that DOGE has flouted laws and rules around data and privacy. Some of the lawsuits have referenced allegations that DOGE is using artificial intelligence to analyze and process government data. The [Washington Post reported](#) in February that DOGE was using artificial intelligence to analyze spending at the Education Department, citing two people familiar with the project.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., [on Monday touted Musk's work](#) in remarks that seemed to confirm the AI reports.

"Elon has cracked the code. He is now inside the agencies. He's created these algorithms that are constantly crawling through the data. And as he told me in his office, the data doesn't lie. We're going to be able to get the information. We're going to be able to transform the way the federal government works at the end of this, and that is a very exciting prospect. It is truly a revolutionary moment for the nation," Johnson said at an event in Washington.

Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, had some harsh words for the way DOGE was operating, calling the email sent to federal workers "intimidation," and saying that she's hearing from federal workers who are being "treated with a level of disregard to their service and to their tenure."

"Just a little bit of humanity and dignity to the process, I think, is what many of the Alaskan federal employees are asking for, and I don't think that that's asking for too much," Murkowski

said.

DOGE's work has led to criticism and instances of workers having to be rehired after they were removed from essential jobs. On Monday, two people familiar with the matter said the administration was [reinstating some employees](#) in the Food and Drug Administration's medical devices division after dozens were laid off as part of DOGE's [cost-cutting initiative](#).

The medical devices division is responsible for approving and monitoring the safety of a range of products, from X-ray machines to surgical implants. The layoffs took place earlier this month, and included physicians and cybersecurity experts.

Some of those employees received phone calls or emails over the weekend informing them that their termination had been rescinded. It's unclear how many employees were offered their jobs back, or how many would ultimately return.

The administration had a similar issue this month with [nuclear safety personnel](#) who had been let go.

In a court ruling Friday, a federal judge in New York issued a preliminary injunction [barring DOGE's access](#) to sensitive Treasury Department systems after a coalition of states [presented evidence](#) that its employees weren't following proper safety protocols.

In a [scathing ruling](#), U.S. District Judge Jeanette Vargas blasted DOGE's "chaotic and haphazard approach" and found the coalition had "established that there is a realistic danger that confidential financial information will be disclosed absent the grant of injunctive relief." 



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