

Many Workers to Avoid City Ahead of New York Convention

By KRIS MAHER
Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
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In less than two weeks, more than 50,000 people will arrive in New York for the Republican National Convention. Meanwhile, many who work in the city are planning to be somewhere else.

Bill Greener, a 25-year-old investment analyst who works at a fund in Manhattan, will be on his honeymoon. He and his wife were married in early July but postponed their holiday so it would overlap with the convention.

Jamie de Jong, 44, senior managing director for global corporate services for real-estate brokerage CB Richard Ellis Inc., says he hopes to "cue up" a business trip rather than commute by train to his Manhattan office from Rockville Center, N.Y.

"There's no better excuse to exit stage left for a few days" than the convention, says Fred Paprin, principal and co-founder of Wildflower Group, a small licensing and merchandising agency. Mr. Paprin's office is about 10 blocks south of Madison Square Garden, the convention's main site. For the week, he will be working from his home in Briarcliff Manor, N.Y., about 30 miles north of the festivities.

Tumbleweeds, or at least a layer of dust, could appear in many New York offices during the week of the convention, Aug. 30 to Sept. 2, as people avoid traveling to the city. One big reason: worries about traffic congestion as numerous routes into town and Manhattan streets are restricted. In addition, heightened security, as well as an edginess from recent terror alerts and a traditional late-summer lassitude, has made coming to work less attractive, and many managers are giving workers the option to stay home.

"We're walking a fine line between saying to everybody, 'You can work from home' and having it be days off, because you know how that is," says Paul Zullo, president and chief executive of Muze Inc., a New York electronic-commerce and content provider with offices in downtown Manhattan.

Flexibility is the order of the day at many workplaces. A survey of New York-area companies by CoreNet Global, an Atlanta trade association for corporate real-estate executives, found that 25% of companies are offering employees the option of working from home during the convention, and 22% are providing a liberal leave policy. Informal plans between individual managers and staffs, which weren't counted, are likely to increase the number of people eligible for flexible schedules.

At the large office of **McGraw-Hill**Cos. in the 2 Penn Plaza building, which is on the same block as Madison Square Garden, a "lighter than usual" work force will report to their offices, as workers take advantage of the company's work-life policies, says Steven Weiss, a company spokesman.

Indeed, one reason some offices may be sparsely staffed is that companies are increasingly comfortable letting people work from home. Kevin Bethke, chief executive of Interactive Video Technologies Inc., in Marina Del Ray, Calif., says he expects an increase in the use of the company's Web-conferencing services during the week of the convention.

In addition to worries about disruptions from protests, the threat of a terrorist

attack during the convention is buzzing in the minds of many New Yorkers as another Sept. 11 anniversary approaches. Mr. de Jong, who now keeps a flashlight, running shoes and a bottle of water in his office in the prominent MetLife Building, says he is "cognizant" of the possibility of a convention-timed attack. Mr. Greener, meanwhile, works in the Citigroup Building, recently named as a potential terror target.

Of course, some New York workplaces will be busier than ever. The Waldorf-Astoria has reserved most of its rooms and function space for the convention, and Tavern on the Green will have "wall-to-wall parties" from Aug. 29 through Sept. 2, according to Shelley Clark, a spokeswoman for both locations.

Write to Kris Maher at kris.maher@wsj.com³