



Questions & Answers Regarding
State Employee Hours of Work Reductions (Furloughs)
For 2009-2011 Biennium

Note: This document applies to Executive Branch agencies and the University of Wisconsin System

*****Please be aware that this is not an exhaustive list of furlough issues but rather answers to general frequently asked questions (FAQs) regarding furloughs based on current information. Situations and information may change which will impact these FAQs. The process/procedures for implementation of furloughs will be forthcoming in a separate document at a later date.*****

A. GENERAL QUESTIONS

A.1. What is a “furlough?”

“Furlough” is the term being used to describe the recent mandate that state employees temporarily reduce their hours of work by 64 hours/eight days each of the next two fiscal years, for a total of 128 hours/16 days over the course of the 2009-2011 biennium. These hours/days will be prorated for part-time employees, including employees in school year, seasonal, or sessional positions. For purposes of this document, the term “furlough” refers to this temporary reduction of work hours or days.

A.2. What authority does the State have to require furloughs?

The State, as the Employer, has the management right, as well as authority under applicable statutes, administrative code, and collective bargaining agreements, to require furloughs.

A.3. Why are state employees being furloughed?

The State of Wisconsin projects a \$6.6 billion deficit over the 2009-2011 biennium. Furloughing state employees over the course of the next biennium is one of the actions being implemented by the Governor to assist in decreasing state expenditures in response to this unprecedented downturn in the national and state economies.

A.4. Which state employees are affected by the furloughs?

It is intended that all state employees will be subject to furloughs.

A.5. Are there differences in how furloughs will be applied to represented and nonrepresented employees?

Represented and nonrepresented employees will be required to take the same amount of furlough hours; however, administration of the furloughs may vary between employees depending on collective bargaining agreements and agency operational needs.



A.6. Will newly hired employees be required to take furloughs?

Yes. The number of furlough hours for employees hired on or after July 1, 2009, will be prorated based on their hire date and their status as part-time or full-time.

A.7. Are LTEs and employees with project appointments subject to the furloughs?

Yes.

A.8. Are employees in positions that are funded with monies other than GPR (e.g., federal funds or grants) subject to furloughs?

It is intended that furloughs will apply to all state employees regardless of the funding source of their positions.

A.9. Are any employees or work locations exempted from these furloughs?

No, it is intended that furloughs will apply to all state employees at all locations.

A.10. When will these furloughs be implemented and when will they end?

Furloughs will be taken over the course of the 2009-2011 biennium (July 1, 2009 through June 30, 2011). The timing of when actual furlough hours are taken by employees is subject to applicable collective bargaining agreements, OSER guidelines, and each individual agency's operational needs.

A.11. How many furlough hours will employees be required to take?

Employees will be required to reduce their hours of work by 64 hours/eight days each fiscal year of the 2009-2011 biennium, for a total of 128 hours/16 days. These hours/days will be prorated for part-time employees (see Question 12, below).

A.12. Will the number of furlough hours be prorated for part-time employees?

Furlough hours will be prorated for part-time employees, including employees in school year, seasonal, or sessional positions.

A.13. Will agencies be permitted to terminate LTEs and project employees in order to forego implementing furloughs for permanent employees?

No, the furloughs will take place regardless of whether any layoffs are necessary. However, LTEs and project employees are subject to a reduction in their work hours to the same extent as permanent state employees.

A.14. Will furloughs take into consideration that employees may have spouses who are also state employees in order to minimize the financial impact on families?

Furloughs apply equally to each state employee. There is no waiver of this requirement for households with more than one state employee.



B. WORK SCHEDULE QUESTIONS

B.1. What flexibility will be provided in determining how to schedule the furlough hours (16 days) over the course of the biennium?

State agencies will have flexibility in determining how their respective employees will reduce their hours or take full days, pursuant to guidelines issued by OSER and DOA and in accordance with applicable collective bargaining agreements. These guidelines will be issued shortly.

B.2. Will employees have flexibility in determining furlough days?

Employees *may* have some flexibility in determining when to reduce their hours, based on agency operational needs and pursuant to guidelines issued by OSER and DOA. These guidelines will be issued shortly.

B.3. Will employees be able to offset their loss of pay due to furlough by working additional hours?

No. Making up furlough days does not achieve the cash savings expected through use of furloughs. It is possible that agency operational needs will require some employees to work overtime, consistent with current agency practices. However, overtime will not be permitted if it is for the sole purpose of making up for furlough hours.

B.4. May an employee volunteer to take additional furlough time or reduce her/his schedule to part-time in order to assume some or all of another employee's furlough time?

No.

B.5. May an agency consider legal holidays as furlough days for LTEs since they are not paid for these days anyway?

No.

B.6. If an employee works for two different agencies, how should they be furloughed?

The required furlough hours will be prorated between the agencies.

B.7. If an agency provides several options to employees for scheduling furlough hours, what determines which employees have first choice of options?

An agency's operational needs must be considered first. For represented employees, relevant provisions of applicable collective bargaining agreements must be followed.



C. COMPENSATION QUESTIONS

- C.1. If an employee is receiving differential pay, e.g., on call or beeper pay, may s/he give up that pay in lieu of the required furlough time?**

No.

D. LEAVE QUESTIONS

- D.1. Will furloughs affect accrual of employees' leave benefits?**

Accrual of vacation, sick leave, and personal and legal holidays will not be affected by furloughs for state employees.

- D.2. May employees substitute paid leave during periods when furloughs are taken?**

No, employees may not use vacation, sick leave, personal or legal holiday, compensatory or professional development time, or any other type of paid leave during furlough periods.

- D.3. How do furloughs affect employees' already scheduled paid leave days?**

Furloughs will not necessarily affect already scheduled paid leave, but will be subject to applicable collective bargaining agreements, OSER guidelines, and each individual agency's operational needs.

- D.4. May an employee use furlough time in conjunction with scheduled vacation?**

This question will be addressed in the guidelines that will be issued by OSER and DOA.

- D.5. Will there be any additional flexibility in allowance for vacation carry-over?**

Current provisions covering carry-over of annual leave will continue to apply.

- D.6. May an employee substitute a furlough day instead of a sick day?**

This question will be addressed in the guidelines that will be issued by OSER and DOA.

- D.7. If an employee is on jury duty, may s/he substitute furlough time for that day?**

This question will be addressed in the guidelines that will be issued by OSER and DOA.

- D.8. How do furloughs affect employees who are using donated leave under a Catastrophic Leave Program?**

Employees using donated leave under a Catastrophic Leave Program will still be required to take the mandatory furlough time each fiscal year.

- D.9. May employees forfeit other paid leave, for example, vacation or sabbatical, instead of taking the furlough hours?**

No, forfeiting other paid leave does not achieve the cash savings expected through use of furloughs.



D.10. May an employee count an unpaid suspension day imposed for disciplinary reasons as a furlough day?

No.

E. BENEFIT QUESTIONS

E.1. Is health insurance affected by the furloughs? Does it affect full-time vs. part-time employees differently?

There is no effect on employees' health insurance benefit. Under ETF statutes, eligibility for health insurance contributions is based on the position to which one is appointed, not on the actual number of hours worked.

E.2. Is life insurance affected by the furloughs? Does it affect full-time vs. part-time employees differently?

Furloughs will have little to no impact on life insurance. Coverage is based on the prior year's earnings. The amount of coverage does not decrease even if earnings decrease in future years. It should be noted that if employees choose to cancel any coverage because of perceived financial hardship, they will have to submit evidence of insurability to regain dropped coverage. If employees have questions, they should contact their agency human resources office or the Department of Employee Trust Funds.

E.3. May employees stop or change their health insurance or life insurance?

It is not recommended that employees stop or change their health or life insurance benefits due to the potential negative consequences of doing so. However, if an employee does stop coverage, s/he would have no other option to reinstate coverage except as provided via evidence of insurability for the life insurance plan and via the Standard Plan with a 180-day waiting period for health insurance. If employees have questions, they should contact their agency human resources office or the Department of Employee Trust Funds.

E.4. Is an employee's seniority date (adjusted continuous service date) affected by the furloughs?

Furloughs do not constitute a break in service. Therefore, there will be no adjustment to an employee's seniority date.

E.5. Will early retirement incentives be offered?

No, there are no plans to offer early retirement incentives.



F. PAYROLL QUESTIONS

F.1. Will a special leave code be developed to track the reduced hours through payroll?

For agencies on Central Payroll, a leave code will be developed specifically for tracking furlough hours. The University of Wisconsin System will also have a tracking system in place.

F.2. Whose responsibility will it be to monitor employees' time to ensure the required furlough time is taken?

For agencies on Central Payroll, reports will be generated tracking furlough hours. The UW is also planning to track furlough hours taken. Guidelines for supervisors will be developed.