



Know Your Contract

To Break or Not To Break

VIU Article 14.05/Residence Article 14.02

During a four (4) hour work period, employees shall be entitled to one (1) paid fifteen (15) minute rest period. Within every seven (7) hour work period [residence CA – eight (8) hour work period], employees shall be entitled to two (2) paid fifteen (15) minute rest periods.

In the age of “do more with less” and instructions like “work smarter not harder”, taking breaks seems like mythical and impossible suggestion.

But ***what are the implications of viewing breaks as a nice theory rather than a right*** for you and an obligation for the employer?

Workload Overload

#1 complaint from members – too much work and not enough staff to do it. There’s a simple solution – take your breaks!

Not taking breaks (or worse working through meal breaks, coming in early or staying late without pay) sets unrealistic expectations of what a single worker can accomplish during a day’s work. Managers can’t justify additional staff unless there is important work that can’t reasonably be completed within existing hours. If taking breaks means work can’t be completed or overtime is required, this ultimately provides managers with justification up the budget chain to adjust workloads or add more staff.

By the Numbers

Every time a break is skipped, the employer gains 15 minutes of free labour. With over 400 staff members in our Local, this adds up!

At straight time wages for one full-time worker (Level 1, Step 1):

- ***In a week – that equals 2.5hrs or \$46.47***
- ***In a year – that equals 115hrs (~3 weeks full-time work) or \$2,137.85 + benefits****

If just 100 members skipping their breaks, that’s **11,500 hours**, or over **6 full-time jobs**, or over a

quarter of a million dollars of Level 1 wages and benefits.

The Flip-Side – The Benefits of Breaks

It is so important, both for physical and psychological wellbeing, to take breaks and walk away from your work station.

Breaks can:

- ***Improve focus and attention to detail*** allowing us to come back to work with renewed energy and sense of purpose;
- ***Serve as creative fuel*** - something as simple as a ten-minute conversation with a friend, or watching an inspiring video can provide a needed boost, or point us in a new direction if we’ve been stuck.
- ***Help prevent mental stagnation*** – humans aren’t designed to sit around all day. Getting up and moving gets our blood flowing and more oxygen to the brain.
- ***Provide more energy than a caffeine boost*** – breaks make us slow down and gives time for a much needed pause. Morning breaks typically lead to more motivation at work and an increased ability to concentrate.
- ***Decrease physical ailments from desk work*** such as headaches, eyestrain and lower back pain.

Studies show, the more hours that elapse before a break, the less energized and more symptoms of poor health workers report when returning to work. In other words, toiling through much of the workday before taking a breather is not as restorative as taking time out early in the day.