INFORMATION MEMO

Fair Labor Standards Act: Compensation for Travel Time

This memo provides guidance in determining when compensation must be paid under the Fair Labor Standards Act when non-exempt employees travel for work purposes.

RELEVANT LINKS:

See LMC information memo

29 C.F.R. 21785.35.
See Appendix A for a travel time decision flow chart.

29 C.F.R. §785.36.

I. Coverage

All cities are covered by the Fair Labor Standards Act. However, some employees are “exempt” from the overtime provisions of the act. The provisions discussed below about compensating employees for travel time when traveling for work purposes applies only to non-exempt employees.

II. Home to work travel

Generally, travel from home to work is not work time, no matter how long the commute. The following examples are exceptions to this rule.

A. Travel from home to work after hours

An employee who has gone home after completing his or her day’s work is called out at night to travel a “substantial distance” to perform an emergency job for one of the employer’s customers. All time spent on such travel is working time. When travel is not a “substantial distance,” the Department of Labor takes no position on the compensability of home to work travel for emergency calls. “Substantial distance” is not defined and, therefore, the matter is left for the parties to negotiate.

B. Travel during the workday

Generally, the time spent by an employee traveling during the workday must be counted as hours worked. Also, if an employee is required to report somewhere before work to pick up materials or perform other work, the travel from the designated place to the workplace is compensable work time.

If the employee travels away from the worksite and the time spent extends beyond the normal workday, the amount of time that counts for hours worked depends on whether the employee is required to report back to work or goes directly home from the other location. If returning to work, the entire period is considered hours worked. If the employee goes home
at the end of the day, the time spent returning home is not considered hours worked.

C. Special one-day assignment in another city

An employee who regularly works at a fixed location in one city is given a special one-day assignment in another city. Because such travel is performed for the employer’s benefit and at the employer’s request, such travel time is generally considered work time. Regular home to work travel time (or travel from home to public transportation) and meal period can be deducted.

III. Overnight travel away from home

Travel away from home is work time when it cuts across the employee’s work day. The time to be considered is not only hours worked on regular working days during normal working hours, but also during the corresponding hours on non-working days.

For example, if an employee regularly works from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, the travel time during these hours is work time on Saturday and Sunday as well as on the other days. Thus, if travel is overnight and done outside of working hours, the travel time is not compensable.

The Wage and Hour Division will not consider as work that time spent in travel away from home outside of regular working hours as a passenger on an airplane, train, boat, bus, or automobile. However, all time spent driving an automobile must be compensated except as described below. Do count regular hours worked when calculating travel done on non-work days, as in the above example. Also see “Work while traveling” section below.

IV. Public transportation

If an employee is offered public transportation but requests permission to drive his or her car instead, the employer may count as hours worked either:

- The time spent driving the car.
- The time the employee would have had to count as hours worked during working hours if the employee had used the public conveyance.

V. Work while traveling

Any work an employee is required to perform while traveling must be counted as hours worked. An employee who drives a truck, bus, automobile, boat, or airplane, or an employee who is required to ride
therein as an assistant or helper, is working while riding. Meal periods and sleep time in adequate facilities furnished by the employer need not be counted.

Here is an example of how work time is calculated for a non-exempt employee traveling overnight.

John, an employee of the City of Anywhere, Minn., attended a meeting for building officials in St. Paul on a Monday. John’s regular work hours are 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. He is a non-exempt employee. Due to the distance of Anywhere from St. Paul, John drove to St. Paul on Sunday.

On Sunday John left Anywhere in his own car at 3 p.m. On his way to St. Paul he stopped at a fast food restaurant from 5 to 5:30 p.m. to get something to eat. He arrived at his hotel in St. Paul at 7 p.m. He called home and then watched a movie on HBO. From 9:30 to 10 p.m. John reviewed materials to be discussed at the meeting on Monday.

On Monday John arrived at the meeting at 8:30 a.m. The meeting attendees received box lunches at 12 p.m. and ate them during a presentation by a state official. The meeting concluded at 2:30 p.m. John checked his voice mail at work and made calls from 3 to 5 p.m. to resolve a work issue. He ate dinner at the hotel restaurant and was on the road by 6:30 p.m. John arrived home at 10 p.m.

For what hours should John be compensated?

On Sunday all meal times are deducted, but all hours as a driver are paid, yielding the following hours worked:

- 3–5 p.m. = 2 hours.
- 5:30–7 p.m. = 1.5 hours.
- 9:30–10 p.m. = .5 hours.
- SUNDAY TOTAL = 4 hours.

On Monday John had to work during lunch, so it is paid time, but his evening meal time is deducted. All his driving hours are paid, yielding the following hours worked:

- 8:30 a.m.–2:30 p.m. = 6 hours.
- 3–5 p.m. = 2 hours.
- 6:30–10 p.m. = 3.5 hours.
- MONDAY TOTAL = 11.5 hours.

Depending on the city’s scheduled work week, and the hours John works the remainder of the week, some of this work time may qualify as overtime.
VI. Further assistance

If you have any additional questions, please contact the League’s Human Resources and Benefits Department.
APPENDIX A: Overnight Travel Time

Appendix 4-C Overnight Travel Time
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OVERNIGHT TRAVEL TIME

Is the travel during the workday?

Compensable

Is the employee traveling during normal working hours on an off-day?

Compensable

Is the employee driving to the location?

Was the employee offered public transportation?

Non-Compensable

Compensable

Non-Compensable