

bargaining agreement or through a memorandum of understanding or other type of oral or written agreement. In the absence of a collective bargaining agreement applicable to the employees, the representative need not be a formal or recognized bargaining agent as long as the representative is designated by the employees. Any agreement must be consistent with the provisions of section 7(o) of the Act.

(2) Section 2(b) of the 1985 Amendments provides that a collective bargaining agreement in effect on April 15, 1986, which permits compensatory time off in lieu of overtime compensation, will remain in effect until the expiration date of the collective bargaining agreement unless otherwise modified. However, the terms and conditions of such agreement under which compensatory time off is provided after April 14, 1986, must not violate the requirements of section 7(o) of the Act and these regulations.

(c) *Agreement or understanding between the public agency and individual employees.* (1) Where employees of a public agency do not have a recognized or otherwise designated representative, the agreement or understanding concerning compensatory time off must be between the public agency and the individual employee and must be reached prior to the performance of work. This agreement or understanding with individual employees need not be in writing, but a record of its existence must be kept. (See §553.50.) An employer need not adopt the same agreement or understanding with different employees and need not provide compensatory time to all employees. The agreement or understanding to provide compensatory time off in lieu of cash overtime compensation may take the form of an express condition of employment, provided (i) the employee knowingly and voluntarily agrees to it as a condition of employment and (ii) the employee is informed that the compensatory time received may be preserved, used or cashed out consistent with the provisions of section 7(o) of the Act. An agreement or understanding may be evidenced by a notice to the employee that compensatory time off will be given in lieu of overtime pay. In such a case, an agreement or understanding

would be presumed to exist for purposes of section 7(o) with respect to any employee who fails to express to the employer an unwillingness to accept compensatory time off in lieu of overtime pay. However, the employee's decision to accept compensatory time off in lieu of cash overtime payments must be made freely and without coercion or pressure.

(2) Section 2(a) of the 1985 Amendments provides that in the case of employees who have no representative and were employed prior to April 15, 1986, a public agency that has had a regular practice of awarding compensatory time off in lieu of overtime pay is deemed to have reached an agreement or understanding with these employees as of April 15, 1986. A public agency need not secure an agreement or understanding with each employee employed prior to that date. If, however, such a regular practice does not conform to the provisions of section 7(o) of the Act, it must be modified to do so with regard to practices after April 14, 1986. With respect to employees hired after April 14, 1986, the public employer who elects to use compensatory time must follow the guidelines on agreements discussed in paragraph (c)(1) of this section.

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**§ 553.24 “Public safety”, “emergency response”, and “seasonal” activities.**

(a) Section 7(o)(3)(A) of the FLSA provides that an employee of a public agency which is a State, a political subdivision of a State, or an interstate governmental agency, may accumulate not more than 480 hours of compensatory time for FLSA overtime hours which are worked after April 15, 1986, if the employee is engaged in “public safety”, “emergency response”, or “seasonal” activity. Employees whose work includes “seasonal”, “emergency response”, or “public safety” activities, as well as other work, will not be subject to both limits of accrual for compensatory time. If the employee's work regularly involves the activities included in the 480-hour limit, the employee will be covered by that limit. A public agency cannot utilize the higher

cap by simple classification or designation of an employee. The work performed is controlling. Assignment of occasional duties within the scope of the higher cap will not entitle the employer to use the higher cap. Employees whose work does not regularly involve "seasonal", "emergency response", or "public safety" activities are subject to a 240-hour compensatory time accrual limit for FLSA overtime hours which are worked after April 15, 1986.

(b) Employees engaged in "public safety", "emergency response", or "seasonal" activities, who transfer to positions subject to the 240-hour limit, may carry over to the new position any accrued compensatory time. The employer will not be required to cash out the accrued compensatory time which is in excess of the lower limit. However, the employee must be compensated in cash wages for any subsequent overtime hours worked until the number of accrued hours of compensatory time falls below the 240-hour limit.

(c) "Public safety activities": The term "public safety activities" as used in section 7(o)(3)(A) of the Act includes law enforcement, fire fighting or related activities as described in §§ 553.210 (a) and (b) and 553.211 (a)-(c), and (f). An employee whose work regularly involves such activities will qualify for the 480-hour accrual limit. However, the 480-hour accrual limit will not apply to office personnel or other civilian employees who may perform public safety activities only in emergency situations, even if they spend substantially all of their time in a particular week in such activities. For example, a maintenance worker employed by a public agency who is called upon to perform fire fighting activities during an emergency would remain subject to the 240-hour limit, even if such employee spent an entire week or several weeks in a year performing public safety activities. Certain employees who work in "public safety" activities for purposes of section 7(o)(3)(A) may qualify for the partial overtime exemption in section 7(k) of the Act. (See § 553.201)

(d) "Emergency response activity": The term "emergency response activity" as used in section 7(o)(3)(A) of the

Act includes dispatching of emergency vehicles and personnel, rescue work and ambulance services. As is the case with "public safety" and "seasonal" activities, an employee must regularly engage in "emergency response" activities to be covered under the 480-hour limit. A city office worker who may be called upon to perform rescue work in the event of a flood or snowstorm would not be covered under the higher limit, since such emergency response activities are not a regular part of the employee's job. Certain employees who work in "emergency response" activities for purposes of section 7(o)(3)(A) may qualify for the partial overtime exemption in section 7(k) of the Act. (See § 553.215.)

(e)(1) "Seasonal activity": The term "seasonal activity" includes work during periods of significantly increased demand, which are of a regular and recurring nature. In determining whether employees are considered engaged in a seasonal activity, the first consideration is whether the activity in which they are engaged is a regular and recurring aspect of the employee's work. The second consideration is whether the projected overtime hours during the period of significantly increased demand are likely to result in the accumulation during such period of more than 240 compensatory time hours (the number available under the lower cap). Such projections will normally be based on the employer's past experience with similar employment situations.

(2) Seasonal activity is not limited strictly to those operations that are very susceptible to changes in the weather. As an example, employees processing tax returns over an extended period of significantly increased demand whose overtime hours could be expected to result in the accumulation during such period of more than 240 compensatory time hours will typically qualify as engaged in a seasonal activity.

(3) While parks and recreation activity is primarily seasonal because peak demand is generally experienced in fair weather, mere periods of short but intense activity do not make an employee's job seasonal. For example, clerical employees working increased hours for

several weeks on a special project or assigned to an afternoon of shoveling snow off the courthouse steps would not be considered engaged in seasonal activities, since the increased activity would not result in the accumulation during such period of more than 240 compensatory time hours. Further, persons employed in municipal auditoriums, theaters, and sports facilities that are open for specific, limited seasons would be considered engaged in seasonal activities, while those employed in facilities that operate year round generally would not.

(4) Road crews, while not necessarily seasonal workers, may have significant periods of peak demand, for instance during the snow plowing season or road construction season. The snow plow operator/road crew employee may be able to accrue compensatory time to the higher cap, while other employees of the same department who do not have lengthy periods of peak seasonal demand would remain under the lower cap.

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**§ 553.25 Conditions for use of compensatory time (“reasonable period”, “unduly disrupt”).**

(a) Section 7(o)(5) of the FLSA provides that any employee of a public agency who has accrued compensatory time and requested use of this compensatory time, shall be permitted to use such time off within a “reasonable period” after making the request, if such use does not “unduly disrupt” the operations of the agency. This provision, however, does not apply to “other compensatory time” (as defined below in § 553.28), including compensatory time accrued for overtime worked prior to April 15, 1986.

(b) Compensatory time cannot be used as a means to avoid statutory overtime compensation. An employee has the right to use compensatory time earned and must not be coerced to accept more compensatory time than an employer can realistically and in good faith expect to be able to grant within a reasonable period of his or her making a request for use of such time.

(c) *Reasonable period.* (1) Whether a request to use compensatory time has

been granted within a “reasonable period” will be determined by considering the customary work practices within the agency based on the facts and circumstances in each case. Such practices include, but are not limited to (a) the normal schedule of work, (b) anticipated peak workloads based on past experience, (c) emergency requirements for staff and services, and (d) the availability of qualified substitute staff.

(2) The use of compensatory time in lieu of cash payment for overtime must be pursuant to some form of agreement or understanding between the employer and the employee (or the representative of the employee) reached prior to the performance of the work. (See § 553.23.) To the extent that the conditions under which an employee can take compensatory time off are contained in an agreement or understanding as defined in § 553.23, the terms of such agreement or understanding will govern the meaning of “reasonable period”.

(d) *Unduly disrupt.* When an employer receives a request for compensatory time off, it shall be honored unless to do so would be “unduly disruptive” to the agency’s operations. Mere inconvenience to the employer is an insufficient basis for denial of a request for compensatory time off. (See H. Rep. 99-331, p. 23.) For an agency to turn down a request from an employee for compensatory time off requires that it should reasonably and in good faith anticipate that it would impose an unreasonable burden on the agency’s ability to provide services of acceptable quality and quantity for the public during the time requested without the use of the employee’s services.

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**§ 553.26 Cash overtime payments.**

(a) Overtime compensation due under section 7 may be paid in cash at the employer’s option, in lieu of providing compensatory time off under section 7(o) of the Act in any workweek or work period. The FLSA does not prohibit an employer from freely substituting cash, in whole or part, for compensatory time off; and overtime