

# We're taking less vacation time

**Workers say increased workload contributing factor**

BY TERESA LATCHFORD  
Staff Writer

As you count down the days until your next vacation, ask yourself: if you are really going to be able to detach yourself from work and rejuvenate.

Vacation is usually something employees look forward to all year, but an Ipsos Reid and Expedia.ca online survey shows fewer people are taking time to kick back and relax.

Although one in five surveyed said he would take a lower salary for more vacation time, which topped the list of preferred job perks, less are actually utilizing their full vacation time.

The survey suggests Canadians are taking only 19 days per year, compared to an average of 21 days the year before.

This could be due to a high stress working environment, said Teija Cumming, a York Region public health nurse with workplace health services.

"People avoid taking time off because there is too much to do," she explained.

"They think no one else can do the job."

Company downsizing, outsourcing and restructuring can also play a role in increasing employee workload, making it more difficult to take time off, she added.

But the fact is employees are less productive and have less enthusiasm about their job if they are on the verge of burning out.

"The majority of our work involves creativity and if someone is burnt out, we can't tell," said Kathy Jamieson, Lotek Wireless Inc. human resource manager.

"We monitor vacation days closely and I have no problem kicking someone out and telling them to take a vacation."

The busiest times of the year for Lotek employees are fall and winter so in the summer, management makes sure enough staff is trained to cover for those on vacation. When staff members are tired, it affects productivity in the office.

"We also encourage people to take vacation in chunks," she added.

"You're just not rested after

## DETAILS, DETAILS

▶ The average vacation is only three to four days long;

▶ One in seven employees doesn't take vacation time;

▶ Vacation improves physical sense of well-being and reduces perception of stress for up to five weeks after return to work and;

▶ Those who take vacation are 30 per cent less likely to develop heart disease and the risk of death is lowered by 20 per cent.

Source: Workplace Wellness Newsletter, Health Canada

only taking a long weekend."

Employees who don't take vacation are more likely to develop bad habits such as alcohol consumption and smoking to cope with stress, Ms Cumming said.

Being exhausted from work also contributes to participation in less leisure and social activities.

"People have these benefits for a reason," fellow public health nurse Mona Hughes said. "But a lot of people see

what the culture of the workplace dictates."

Management has to take an active roll and make an effort to take vacation time.

If employees notice management doesn't take time for rest and relaxation, it may result in others deciding a vacation is not acceptable.

Another annual online vacation survey by career-builder.com found of workers who take vacation time, one in four take work with them.

The results also show 16 per cent feel guilty for missing work, even if they are plugging away on laptops at the cottage or using a BlackBerry at the beach to find out what is going on at the office.

"We encourage people not to call in or check e-mails when on vacation because they are on vacation," Ms Jamieson said.

"We still live in a culture where work comes first," Ms Cumming explained.

"That's why so many people feel guilty when they go on vacation."

But going on vacation can improve productivity, enthusiasm and emotional state of mind, she added, which makes a well rested employee more of an asset in the long run.

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