

FREE SATURDAY PROVISION FOR H & J ROUTES:
BY RONNIE STUTTS

The free Saturday rule is new to many rural carriers, since most carriers have been on K routes for several years. Congress first granted "Free Saturdays" to rural carriers because they were scheduled to work six days a week when other Postal service employees were scheduled to work only five days per week. The provisions for this law were put into effect on February 1, 1947, and approved on April 30, 1947. The Saturday leave provisions were made part of the National Agreement at a later date and are found in Article 10 section 4.A. The Saturday leave provisions still only apply to those carriers scheduled for work 6 days per week. A carrier assigned to an H route is entitled to the Saturday provisions on each Saturday provided the carrier meets the requirements. A carrier assigned to a J route is entitled to the Saturday leave provisions only when the J day does not interrupt the sick or annual leave period that would qualify the carrier to have the Saturday not to be charged to annual leave. A (K) route carrier is never entitled to the "Free Saturday" provisions, since they are not scheduled to work 6 days per week.

Rules for approved absences of rural carriers, substitute rural carriers (des. 73), or rural carrier associates in a leave earning capacity are subject to the specific conditions of the USPS-NRLCA National Agreement accordingly:

- a. Absence on Saturday which occurs within or, at the beginning or end of a period of annual leave or sick leave, is not charged to such leave, nor is there loss of compensation provided:
 - (1) There are 5 or more days of annual leave or sick leave within the period; or
 - (2) There are 4 or more days of annual or sick leave plus a holiday. If the holiday falls on a Saturday which is a scheduled workday, absence on the preceding Friday is not charged to leave. If the leave period is for less than 4 days, absence on Friday is charged to leave; or
- b. Interruption during the approved period of annual leave or sick leave by court leave due to circumstances beyond the carrier's control does not disqualify the carrier for coverage as provided above; or
- c. Upon request, a rural carrier is granted annual leave or LWOP on Saturday; at the carrier's option provided a leave replacement is available for replacement.

** The appropriate leave balance on the check stub (Form 1223) must reflect a minimum of 6 days leave (annual and/or sick) to qualify for the "Free Saturday(s)".

Relief day other than Saturday
For "Free Saturday" Provision:

The situation is a bit more complex for the J-route carrier with a relief day other than Saturday. When a carrier on a J route has a relief day other than Saturday, the "Free Saturday" leave charging provisions will be applied as follows:

- (1) If leave is taken during a period of Saturday through Saturday of the Week which includes the relief day (J) day, the carrier would be charged 6 days annual leave. (As an example assume that Monday May 6th was the relief day or (J) day and the carrier is on annual leave from Saturday May 4th through Saturday May 11th. The continuity of his or her period of leave is broken by the relief day or (J) day. Therefore he or she would be charged with 6 days of annual leave.

(2) If the same carrier takes leave for the period of Saturday May 11th Through Saturday May 18th, which does not include his or her relief day, (J) day, he or she would be charged for only 5 days annual, since Monday May 13th is a scheduled work day and not the relief day, (J) day.

**The above example would be the same regardless of the relief day taken other than Saturday.

The rule of thumb is no matter what day of the week is taken for the relief day other than Saturday, you cannot utilize the relief day within a period of leave to obtain a "Free Saturday."

***Remember, it has to be mutually agreeable to both the Regular carrier and the Manager to change a relief day to another day other than Saturday on a J route.

Leave taken for the purpose of the "Free Saturday" does not have to be in the same pay period. The pay system will calculate the "Free Saturday" when it over-laps into another pay period.

In a directive issued by the USPS on 3 March 2004, a change was made in the long-standing and widely accepted practice of permitting "X", "O", and "Z" days to qualify a carrier for a free Saturday(s). According to the directive, effective pay period 06-04, the following rural DACA codes will not break the continuity for a "free Saturday" on a "J" or "H" route:

Annual Leave, DACA code A

Sick Leave, DACA code S

Donated Leave, DACA code D

Court Leave, DACA code 6 (new code)

Holiday Leave, DACA code H

The use of any other DACA codes during a period of leave will break the continuity of the leave and therefore disqualify the carrier for a "free Saturday."

Caution should be taken when taking annual leave for the purpose of the free Saturday provision. If you are unsure, have your manager refer to the F-21 chapter 5 or give me a call.

PS FORM 3971:

It is imperative that rural carriers fill out a request for leave form (PS form 3971), for the entire period of requested leave. Even though the Saturday(s) are free, the PS form 3971 should reflect requested annual or sick leave for the Saturdays.

EFFECT OF HOLIDAYS:

If a Holiday falls within the period of five otherwise chargeable days, the leave balance is

reduced by only four (4) days, and there is no leave charged for the Saturdays within or at the end of the period.

When the leave period ends on a Saturday, which is also a Holiday, the preceding Friday is considered to be the Holiday. Both Saturdays are free, and the leave charge is four (4) days.

The situation is a little different if the first day of the leave period is a Saturday and also a Holiday. To take full advantage of the free Saturday provision, it would be necessary to begin the leave period on the preceding Friday. The Friday would be considered the Holiday, and the Saturday would be free, and five (5) days annual leave would be charged. If the leave period began on Saturday instead of the Friday, five (5) days would still be charged.

CODING FREE SATURDAYS ON THE TIME CARD

Caution should be taken when coding the time card for the "Free Saturday". Even though the Saturday(s) will not be charged to Annual leave, the time card must be coded as annual leave or sick leave for the Saturdays. An X or O cannot be coded on the time card for the Saturday. This will interrupt the "Free Saturday".

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR FREE SATURDAY BY RONNIE STUTTS

1. I am assigned to an H route. I have requested annual leave from Saturday through Saturday. The first Saturday of the requested leave period is a Holiday. It is my understanding that if I request annual leave beginning on the Friday before the Holiday through the next Saturday I will only be charged for 5 days annual leave since the Friday would then be considered my Holiday. Is this true? YES.

In the above example, whether you request leave from the Friday through the next Saturday or the Saturday through Saturday, you will still be charged (5) days annual leave. It would be to your advantage to request leave from the Friday before the Holiday through the next Saturday. You would actually be off (8) days excluding Sunday and only charged (5) days annual leave.

2. I am assigned to an H route and requested annual leave from Saturday through Saturday. My manager denied my annual leave for the last Saturday of the requested annual leave period because my assigned leave replacement was not available. That will cause me to lose the free Saturday. Can my manager disapprove my annual leave for that day? YES. IF THERE IS NO LEAVE REPLACEMENT AVAILABLE.

It is important to note that the free Saturday provision does not change the contract language for approving annual leave. Article 10. section 2. of our contract states in part, "Rural carriers should be granted annual leave in accordance with their personal wishes, provided a leave replacement is available". In the above example it should be determined why the assigned leave replacement was not available. The assigned leave replacement's first responsibility is to that route. In addition, management should consider other available leave replacements prior to denying the annual leave. If there are none available, management could deny the annual leave. It would be advisable to request annual leave, especially for a full week, as far in advance as possible.

3. We have not used the PS from 3971's (request for leave) in our office in the past. We

have just always called our leave replacement when we wanted annual leave. Our manager now tells us that we must fill out the PS form 3971 if we want to take leave. Is this true? YES.

It is required that rural carriers fill out a PS form 3971 when requesting leave. Management should promptly annotate the PS form 3971, either approving or disapproving the leave. If the leave is disapproved, management should note on the PS form 3971 the reason for disapproving the leave and give you a copy for your records.

4. I am on an H route and recently requested annual leave Monday through Friday. I did not request annual leave for the Saturdays since they are free. My manager told me that if I wanted off on the Saturdays, that I must include them on the PS form 3971 as requested annual leave. Is this true? If they are free why should I request them as annual leave. YES. IT IS TRUE.

It is imperative that you include a request for leave for the entire period to include the Saturdays. Even though the pay system will not charge the Saturdays to annual leave, these are scheduled work days and you must include them in your request for leave. Also, the Saturdays on the time card in the above example must be coded as (A) for annual leave, even though the system will not charge the Saturdays to annual leave.

5. I am on a J route and have requested annual leave for Monday through Friday and sick leave on Saturday, which would be my scheduled Saturday to work. My manager told me that if I took sick leave for that Saturday, the pay system would charge me with sick leave and I would lose the free Saturday. Is this true? NO.

Your manager is not correct. In the above example, you will be off Saturday through Saturday and be on annual leave Monday through Friday and sick leave on Saturday. The Saturday that is coded sick leave will be a free Saturday. Saturdays can be coded either (A) for annual leave or (S) for sick leave for the purpose of free Saturday(s). Note: Saturdays cannot be coded (O) or (X) for the free Saturday provision.

6. I am on a J route and planning to take off Tuesday through the following Monday on leave. The Saturday is my scheduled day to work. I have 2 X days accumulated. Can I use the X days in conjunction with annual leave to get the free Saturday? YES.

In the example above the X days can be used to get the free Saturday. However, the Saturday must be coded (A) for annual leave. Saturdays cannot be coded as (X) days for the purpose of free Saturday(s).

7. I am a certified local steward in my office. I am assigned to an H route and plan to take leave from Saturday through Saturday. I have accumulated 2 (Z) days, (Code used for steward work). Can I use these Z days in conjunction with annual leave and get the free Saturdays? NO.

Z days cannot be used for free Saturdays, because the pay system cannot differentiate from accumulated steward work toward a day off or if the entire day was taken for the Steward work.

8. I am assigned to an H route and serve as an Academy Instructor for newly hired leave replacements. I am planning to take off Saturday through Saturday on leave,

however, I am needed to train at the academy on Thursday of that week. I am coded (P) when I train at the academy. Can I use the P code in conjunction with annual leave and still get the free Saturdays? NO.

A code (P) is used for rural carriers when performing work other than on their rural route. Since the code (P) is an actual work day, it cannot be used in conjunction with annual leave and get the free Saturday(s).

9. I am assigned to J route and plan to take off Saturday through Saturday on leave. I am a facilitator for the QWL/EI process. When I take off the entire day for QWL/EI work, I am coded (F) on the time card. I am needed to do QWL/EI work on Tuesday of that week. Can I use the (F) code in conjunction with annual leave and get the free Saturdays? NO.

A code (F) is an actual work day for QWL/EI activities and cannot be used in conjunction with annual leave and get the free Saturday(s).

10. I am assigned to an H route and plan to take Saturday through Saturday on leave. I have accumulated 3 (O) days for AMS work in my office. Can I use the (O) days in conjunction with annual leave and get the free Saturdays? YES.

(O) days, (Other leave), can be used in conjunction with annual leave and get the free Saturday(s). However, the Saturday(s) in the example above must be coded (A) for annual leave. Saturdays cannot be coded as (O) days and get the free Saturday(s).

11. I am assigned to a J route and plan to take off Saturday through Saturday on annual leave. My manager told me that I would not get the free Saturday because the second Saturday of my requested leave would be in a different pay period. Is this true? NO.

Leave taken for the purpose of the "Free Saturday" does not have to be in the same pay period. The pay system will calculate the "Free Saturday" when it overlaps into another pay period.

12. I am on an H route and plan to take off Saturday through Saturday on annual leave except that on Wednesday I have been called for Jury Duty. Will the one day of Jury Duty keep me from getting the "Free Saturdays"? NO.

Court leave per the Employee Labor and Relations Manual beyond the carriers Control will not disqualify the carrier for the "Free Saturday(s)".

13. I am on a J route and this next Saturday is my scheduled J day, (relief day). I am scheduled to work my relief day on that Saturday. I plan to take annual leave the following Monday through Saturday. Will the Saturday be "Free"? and how would the time card be coded? YES.

The Saturday would be "Free" and not charged to annual leave, because you would have (5) days of annual leave in conjunction with the Saturday. The scheduled relief day would be coded as (R), code (3), or code (5) whichever would be appropriate for the relief day worked. Monday through Saturday would be coded on the time card as annual leave code (A). The Saturday, even though coded as (A) would be "Free" and not charged to annual leave.

