

UNISON National Ambulance Sector Committee position on meal break recommendations made by the National Ambulance Partnership Forum.

On 9 October 2007 the UNISON National Ambulance Sector Committee considered the following recommendations made by the National Ambulance Partnership Forum (NAPF).

The term meal break in this document is used to describe the main rest break in a shift during which a meal is taken.

The National Ambulance Partnership Forum is recommending the following core principles be applied to all meal break arrangements in English Ambulance Trusts:

1. The meal break should be exclusive of working time.
2. A minimum of 30 minutes should be allocated for the meal break in shifts of 8 hours or more duration, 37.5 minutes for 10 hour shifts and 45 minutes for 12 hour shifts
3. Meal breaks should commence within the following windows:
 - For 8 hour shifts – between the 3rd and 5th hour
 - For 10 hour shifts – between the 3rd and 6th hour
 - For 12 hour shifts – between the 3rd and 6th hour

Consideration can be given to splitting a 45 minute allocation by agreement providing this does not contravene relevant legislation.

If the meal break has not commenced by the by the 5th / 6th hour staff will be taken out of the system immediately after completion of their task and stood down.

4. Meal break location should be determined locally, jointly and in partnership with the principle of maintaining existing arrangements where these have been jointly agreed.
5. Section 18 of the AfC terms and conditions should apply where meal breaks are taken away from base.
6. Staff availability to be interrupted during their meal break should be on a voluntary basis only.
7. Compensatory arrangements for any meal break time interrupted should include compensatory time within the shift to ensure the requirements of the working time regulations are met, namely that as soon as possible in the shift affected staff are stood down and an uninterrupted rest period of not less than 20 minutes is taken.
8. Compensatory payments for any time interrupted should be those prescribed by Agenda for Change, Section 10.1, namely any payment should be equivalent to the rate for normal working time.
9. Each Trust should, working in partnership and to a standard format, monitor meal breaks allocated and taken, disturbance rates and window compliance.

Notwithstanding that the National Sector Committee's 6 regional representatives to the NAPF had agreed to the above at the NAPF meeting on 2 October 2007, the Committee felt that the principles were incompatible with existing arrangements and UNISON Ambulance Sector policy. In the circumstances the Sector Committee is recommending the following as an alternative proposal:

- Ambulance trust meal break arrangements should be compatible with the provisions of Agenda for Change (AfC) and existing regulations including those relating to working time.
- Elements of meal break arrangements that are not governed by AfC and / or legislation should be determined locally.

Ambulance branches are now asked to seek their members views on their preferred proposal out of the two detailed above and advise of the outcome through their regional representatives to the National Sector Committee no later than Friday 30 November 2007.