

# Employment Law Around The Campfire: Best Practices For Summer Workplace Law Issues



We have a short and sweet summer in Canada. Getting outdoors is a sacred rite for all, given how short our summer is. So how should employers balance that instinct with the fact that the business must go on?

Here are some best practices for the mixed bag of common summertime workplace law issues.

## 1. Dress Code Debates

**Challenge:** Summer often inspires more relaxed and creative fashion choices among employees, which can lead to debates and potential dress code violations.

### Best Practices:

- **Clear Communication:** At the beginning of summer, reiterate the company's dress code policy, if you have one. Highlight specific examples of what is and isn't acceptable. Many companies have let this issue go post-pandemic, but it's certainly valid to maintain some basic standards, particularly if you have a customer-facing business.
- **Allow Some Flexibility:** Consider relaxing the dress code slightly to accommodate the warmer weather. For instance, allow short sleeves and lighter fabrics while still maintaining a professional appearance.
- **Be Inclusive:** Ensure the dress code policy is inclusive and considerate of cultural and religious attire.
- **Enforcement:** Address dress code violations privately and respectfully. Provide clear guidance on the changes needed.

## 2. Flexible Working Hours Confusion

**Challenge:** With longer days and summer activities, some employees might misinterpret flexible working hours, leading to reduced productivity.

### Best Practices:

- **Set Clear Guidelines:** Define what flexible working hours mean for your organization. Specify core working hours during which all employees must be available.
- **Communicate Expectations:** Make sure employees understand that flexible hours do

not equate to arbitrary work schedules. Clarify the importance of maintaining productivity and meeting deadlines.

- **Monitor Productivity:** Use project management tools to track progress and ensure that work is being completed efficiently, regardless of when it is done.
- **Provide Support:** Offer tools and resources to help employees manage their time effectively, such as time management workshops or apps. In some cases and if the business allows, consider stretching out some deadlines, knowing summer vacations will likely impact overall schedules.

### 3. Pets in the Workplace

**Challenge:** An overall increase in informality at the workplace, as well as an increase in pet ownership and an Instagram/TikTok awareness of how awesome dogs are, has led to more requests to bring pets to work, which can cause disruptions and potential liability issues.

#### Best Practices:

- **Create a Pet Policy:** Develop a comprehensive pet policy that outlines the rules and expectations for bringing pets to the workplace. Include considerations for allergies, pet behaviour, and hygiene.
- **Trial Period:** Consider a trial period for allowing pets at work to gauge the impact on the office environment.
- **Designate Pet Areas:** If possible, designate specific areas where pets are allowed. This can help manage pet-related disruptions and keep certain areas pet-free for employees who prefer it.
- **Liability Waivers:** You could consider having employees sign liability waivers to address any potential incidents involving pets. If it's a big issue to allow pets, just say no to anything but service animals. It's not any sort of legal right otherwise, despite what my online feed seems to tell me.

### 4. Summer Fridays

**Challenge:** Some workplaces have summer hours, where people can leave early, adjust their schedule, condense hours earlier in the week for Fridays off, etc. Variable practices can lead to confusion and feelings of unfairness.

#### Best Practices:

- **Fair Implementation:** If you are going to roll this out, decide on a fair system for summer hours, whether it's alternating weeks, a lottery system, or a first-come, first-served basis. Ensure that all employees have an equal opportunity to benefit. If you are unionized, different CBA considerations will no doubt apply.
- **Clear Policy:** Clearly outline the policy for summer hours, including who is eligible, how often they can be taken, and any conditions that must be met (e.g., completion of weekly tasks, minimum length of service, etc).
- **Maintain Coverage:** Plan ahead to ensure that essential business functions are covered during summer hours. Rotate teams or assign backup personnel as needed.
- **Feedback Loop:** Collect feedback from employees on how summer hours are working and make adjustments as necessary to improve fairness and efficiency.

### 5. Holiday Request Overload

**Challenge:** The surge in vacation requests during the summer can lead to scheduling conflicts and understaffed departments.

#### Best Practices:

- **Early Planning:** Start in January. Encourage employees to submit vacation requests as early as possible. This allows for better planning and minimizes last-minute disruptions.
- **Transparent Process:** Use a transparent process for approving vacation requests, such as a first-come, first-served basis or a lottery system. Make sure the criteria for approval are clear and communicated to all employees. Again if you are unionized, defer to your CBA process.
- **Fair Distribution:** Ensure that vacation time is distributed fairly among employees. If too many requests overlap, consider negotiating with employees to stagger their time off.
- **Temporary Coverage:** Plan for temporary coverage by cross-training employees or hiring temporary staff. This ensures that essential tasks are still completed while employees are on vacation. In some cases and if business allows, consider adjusting overall volume expectations to stay realistic that most employees will want a week or two off every summer.
- **Technology Tools:** Use scheduling software to manage vacation requests and maintain a visual overview of employee availability.

## Conclusion

Handling these common summer workplace legal issues effectively can improve workplace morale and productivity during the summer months, and hopefully avoid some headaches. There's no magic to summer workplace logistics, but there's no doubt that most employees place high value on getting outside the office, unplugging and recharging.

Give us a shout if you need a hand navigating any of these issues!

*The content of this article is intended to provide a general guide to the subject matter. Specialist advice should be sought about your specific circumstances.*

Author: [Lisa Stam](#)

Spring Law