

Hard-working Goddard Technical Workers / Change in Policy in Granting Exigencies

You hear the phrase “hard-working Americans” quite a bit. It is often in the context of contrasting lower-income workers earning an hourly wage versus corporate fat cats. At Goddard, there is substantial evidence that many of us are working too hard, because we are not taking vacation as much as we are entitled to.

This is something that is not unique to Goddard. Americans are known for taking less vacation than our peers in other countries. According to <https://www.projecttimeoff.com/research/state-american-vacation-2016>, the average in America used to be about 21 days (four weeks) per year taken off, but this has recently dropped, and for 2015 was down to 16.2 days per year. Some call this “Americans’ lost week”. “More than half of American workers surveyed—55 percent—left vacation days unused in 2015.” Meanwhile, the government is not giving civil servants less time off (well, we’ll see if that holds up), and with an ageing workforce we tend to have a lot more available leave than the rest of society around us is accustomed to. Plus, for many of us, we love what we do, and are excited to come to work, and are not as itchy to go on vacation as some others might be.

Goddard policies have previously made it relatively easy to get exigency awarded, and to carry over leave. We work important missions, and the practice and policy was to get exigency status for an entire project and apply that to every individual on that project who asked for it. Word has come down from the agency to Goddard to stop doing this. Each individual is to be assessed as to why they were not able, due to pressing issues at work, to take vacation and use their leave. There are likely to be cases where people who did not schedule and take leave will be told they could have, and should have, and their request to take leave near the end of the year will be allowed.

Can GESTA do anything about this? We have raised this issue in our semi-annual meetings with the center director and his senior staff. We are encouraging flight projects to not rely so intently on individuals who either feel forced, or are forced, to sacrifice themselves. Spread the work around enough that even key personnel can manage to take vacations! Projects should encourage folks to use the leave they have earned, to re-charge and refresh, rather than burn themselves out.

GESTA strongly recommends that each employee manage their leave and leave requests throughout the year and as early as possible, in particular during the holiday season, to ensure that the leave that you are entitled to is used as you deserve.

If we hear a significant ground-swell from dues-paying members, or even from other members of the bargaining unit, we could try to further challenge some aspect of how this is done. This would most likely take the form of insisting on checks and balances, for a way to appeal a decision, and for more clear guidance up front as to how to avoid a problem. The union leadership is always open to constructive suggestions, and we are sensitive to priorities coming from those we represent. If this is an important issue to you, we want to hear from you!