

Paid Lunch and Paid Rest Time Benefits: Highlights from the Employee Benefits Survey, 1979-93

BY HILERY SIMPSON

Slightly more than half of the Nation's nonagricultural workers receive paid rest breaks, and about 1 in 10 are granted formal paid lunch time. After 15 years of surveying these benefits, the Employee Benefit Survey (EBS) concluded their publication with the release of 1993 data on medium and large private establishments, published in 1994. These benefits were eliminated from the survey due to budgetary constraints, lack of change over time in the publishable data, and limited public interest, among other factors. This article reviews the accumulated data on paid lunch and rest periods, and explains why these benefits were dropped from the EBS surveys.

Background

At its inception in 1979, the survey was limited to medium and large private establishments (those with 100 or more employees). In 1986, the EBS expanded its scope to include most civilian nonagricultural employees.

When the State and local government survey was introduced in 1987, paid lunch and paid rest benefits were included; and they were also part of the first survey of small private establishments (those with fewer than 100 employees) introduced in 1990.

During the 15-year period paid

lunch and paid rest benefits were collected, the EBS increased the scope and detail of its published data. When the survey was initiated, it included incidence data on paid lunch and rest periods by occupational group for full-time employees of medium and large private establishments. By 1982, more detail was available, including data on the average minutes per day allowed for each benefit. The increase in scope was followed by an increase in detail. Data for part-time employees were first published in 1991. The following year, data were published by union and non-union status; and in 1993, by Census regions and for goods-producing and service-producing industries.

Full-time employees

In 1979, full-time employees in medium and large private establishments were six times more likely to receive paid rest time compared to paid lunch time. (See chart 1.) Results were similar for 1993, when about two-thirds of employees were granted rest breaks compared to about one-tenth with paid lunch periods. Full-time employees in small establishments and State and local governments also had a higher incidence of paid rest than paid lunch time. (See charts 2 and 3.) In 1992, the most recent year available, 9 percent of small private establishment employees received paid lunch time, while 49 percent had paid rest time. Similar results were found in the 1992 State and local government survey.

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Chart 1. Percent of full-time employees in medium and large private establishments with paid lunch time and paid rest time, selected years 1979-93

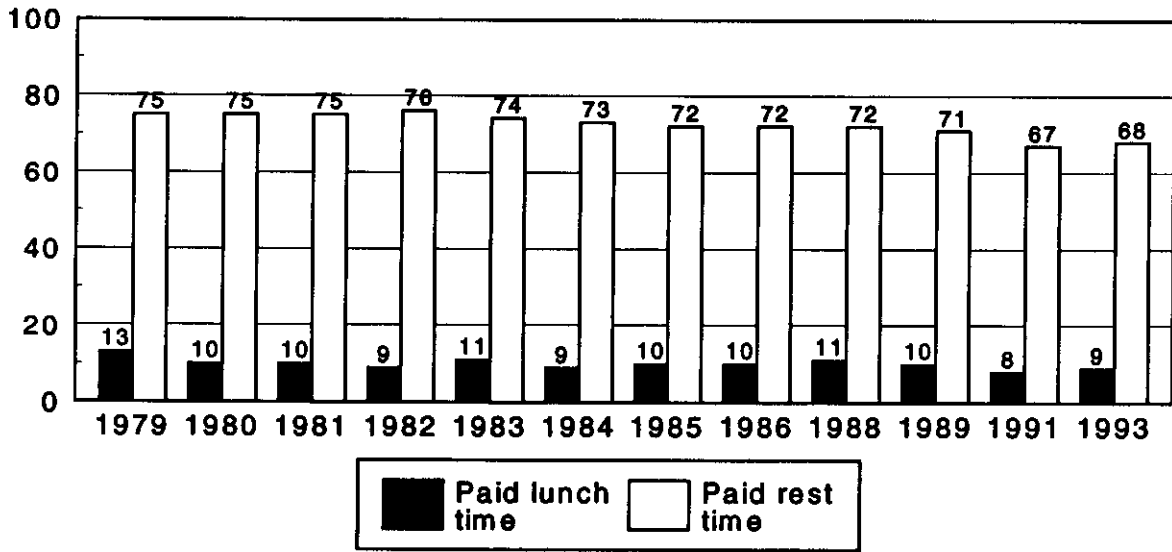
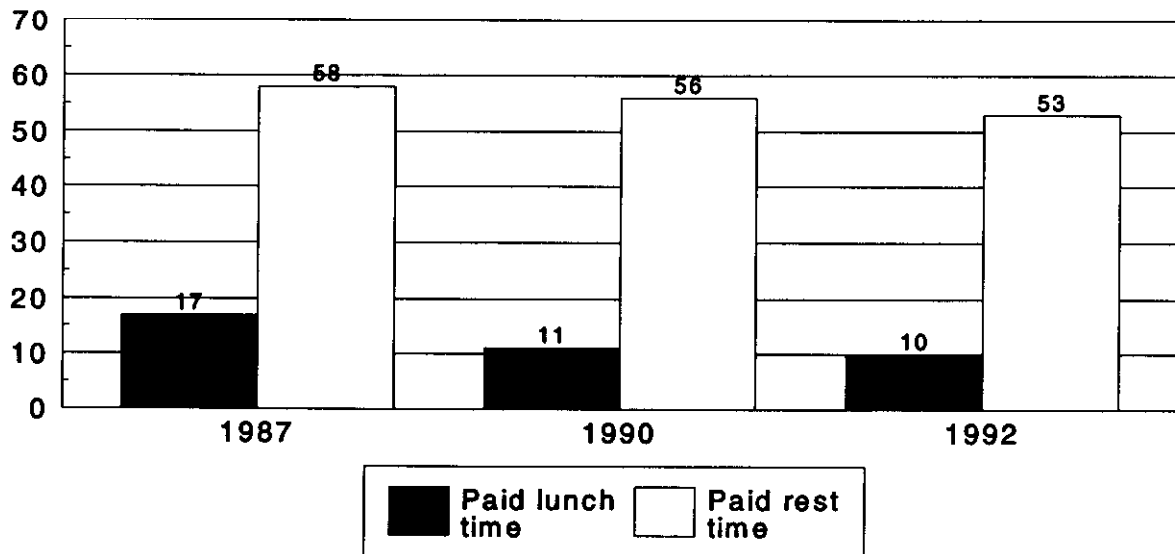


Chart 2. Percent of full-time employees in State and local governments with paid lunch time and paid rest time, selected years 1987, 1990, and 1992



Paid lunch time is a formal paid period allowed by the employer for employees to eat lunch during the work day. To be reported as a paid lunch plan in the survey, the time must be included in the work schedule and the employer must have considered it a formal benefit. (Informal or "casual" plans are excluded from the EBS. In addition, data on unpaid lunch periods are not collected because they are outside the work schedule.)

Paid rest time is a formal period during the work day, away from primary job duties, usually lasting 10-15 minutes per occurrence. This time is most often used for coffee breaks, but formal time for clean-up, wash-up, and preparation tasks are also included in the EBS definition. Like paid lunch time, paid rest time must be included in the work schedule and be considered a formal benefit to be included in the survey.

Paid lunch and rest data have changed little over time. Considering changes in survey scope and in data collection techniques, as well as sampling error, small changes in the data from one year to the next were not significant. Between 1979 and 1993, the percentage of full-time employees in medium and large private establishments with paid lunch or rest time varied no more than a few percentage points. Similar stability was found in the small establishment and State and local government data.

Chart 2 shows the percentage of full-time employees in State and local governments with paid lunch and rest time. However, due to changes in survey scope and collection techniques, 1987 data are not strictly comparable with data for 1990 and 1992. In 1992, the last year these data were published, 53 percent of full-time employees in State and local governments received paid rest time and 10 percent received paid lunch periods. Although, full-time employees of medium and large private establish-

ments were more likely to have paid rest time (68 percent), there were no significant differences in the incidence of paid lunch time (9 percent).

Chart 3 shows incidence data for full-time employees of small private establishments. In 1992, the last year that these data were published, 49 percent of the full-time employees had paid rest and 9 percent had paid lunch time.

Length of lunch and rest periods

Like data on incidence of these benefits, data on the length of paid lunch and rest periods showed little variation over time. (See table 1.) By 1991, paid rest averaged 28 minutes per day and paid lunch table shows averaged 26 minutes per day, a slight increase over the 1982 data. (Data on average minutes per day were not published in 1993.) The changes reported for 1982 through 1991 were not significant. Provisions were similar in small private establishments and State and local governments. (See table 2.)

Chart 3. Percent of full-time employees in small private establishments with paid lunch and paid rest time, 1990 and 1992

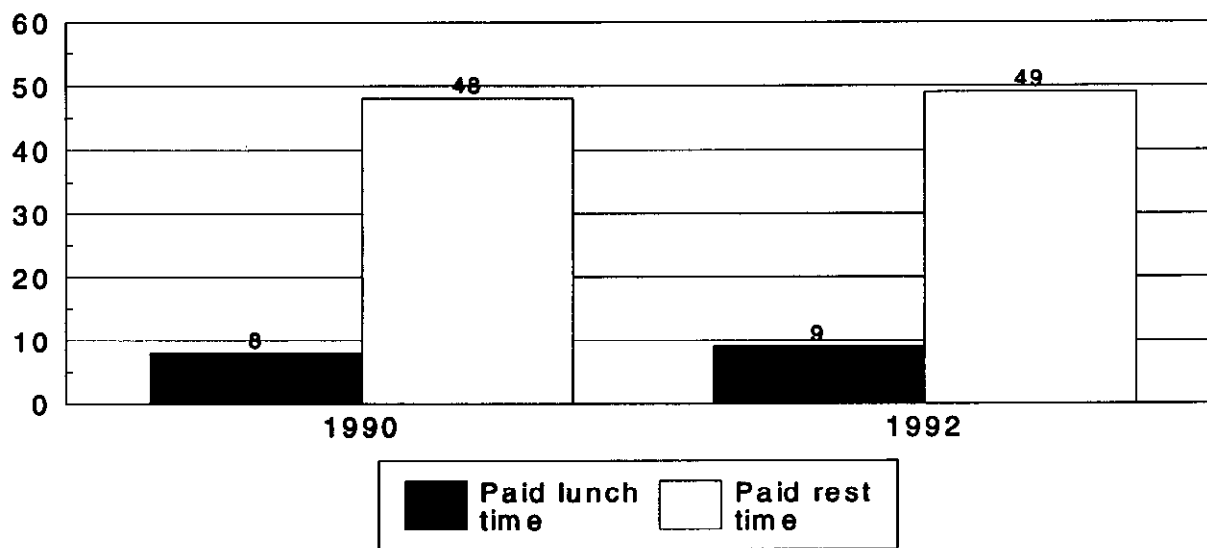


Table 1. Average minutes per day for paid lunch time and paid rest time, full-time employees in medium and large private establishments, selected years, 1982-91

Year	Paid lunch time	Paid rest time
1982	25	25
1983	25	25
1984	26	26
1985	27	26
1986	27	26
1988	29	26
1989	26	26
1991	26	28

Occupational data

Changes in the way in which occupational groups were defined have made it difficult to compare occupational data prior to 1989 with data published later. Through 1989, EBS private establishment data were

published according to the following three occupational categories: Professional and administrative employees, technical and clerical employees, and production employees. In 1990, the occupational categories became professional, technical, and related employees, clerical and sales employees, and blue-collar and service employees. Additionally, occupational data are often not comparable between private establishments and State and local governments, because the government survey combines professional and clerical employees into one occupational group so that teachers, a significant portion of State and local government employees, can be published separately. (See table 3.)

The incidence of paid lunch time

varied considerably among occupational groups, with blue-collar and service employees more likely to have paid lunch and rest benefits than their white-collar counterparts. The exceptions were professional employees in the 1992 small establishment survey and teachers in the 1992 State and local government survey, both groups of whom had a slightly higher incidence of paid lunch time.

The incidence of paid rest time varied considerably by occupation. (See table 3.) As with paid lunch time, private sector blue-collar and service workers were more likely than white-collar workers to receive paid rest breaks. Among State and local governments, teachers were much less likely to be granted paid rest time than other workers.

Table 2. Average minutes per day for paid lunch time and paid rest time, full-time employees in small private establishments and State and local governments, selected years, 1987, 1990, and 1992

Year	State and local governments		Small private establishments	
	Paid lunch time	Paid rest time	Paid lunch time	Paid rest time
1987	34	29	(¹)	(¹)
1990	36	29	37	27
1992	34	29	37	26

¹ Not surveyed

Table 3. Percent of full-time employees with paid lunch time and paid rest, 1991-92

Occupation	Medium and large establishments, 1991	Small private establishments, 1992	Occupation	State and local governments, 1992
Paid lunch				
Professional, technical, and related ..	5	12	White-collar, except teachers ...	6
Clerical and sales	4	8	Teachers	14
Blue-collar and service	11	8	Blue-collar and service	13
Paid rest				
Professional, technical, and related ..	58	40	White-collar, except teachers ...	68
Clerical and sales	67	43	Teachers	20
Blue-collar and service	71	56	Blue-collar and service	64

In the 1990 governments survey, separate data were tabulated for police and firefighters. Four of 10 full-time protective services workers had paid lunch time (averaging 40 minutes)—the highest incidence observed among occupational groups studied—and half had paid rest time plans (averaging 33 minutes).

Part-time employees

In 1990, data for part-time employees were included for the first time with the publication of data for small private establishments and State and local governments. As is generally the case with employee benefits, the incidence of paid rest and lunch breaks was lower for part-time workers than for full-time workers. Among part-time government employees, 34 percent had paid rest time and 3 percent had paid lunch time in 1990. Similar results were obtained in the 1990 small private establishment survey; paid rest time was granted to 27 percent of part-time employees and paid lunch periods to 5 percent. The results of the 1992 surveys were virtually identical.

The 1991 survey of medium and large private establishment found that 56 percent of part-time employees had paid rest periods, while 2 percent had paid lunch time. The 1993 survey reported 59 percent of part-time workers had paid rest breaks, while the percent of employees with paid lunch remained constant at 2 percent.

Union status

EBS started publishing data on full-time workers by union and non-union status in 1992. The surveys found that there was no significant differences in the incidence of paid rest time among union and non-union government employees, but non-union employees in small establishments were less likely to have paid rest time (47 percent) than were unionized ones (66 percent). In 1993, data by union status were published for the first time for

medium and large private establishments. Results were similar to those recorded for the 1992 small establishment survey. Unionized employees (74 percent) were somewhat more likely to have paid rest breaks than non-union ones (66 percent).

The situation was different for paid lunch time. Union status appeared to make little difference in the incidence of paid lunch time in private industry. In State and local governments, however, unionized workers were somewhat more likely (12 percent) to receive paid lunch periods than non-union workers (8 percent).

Geographic areas

Data for full-time employees by geographic area were made available with the release of 1993 data on medium and large private establishments. The data were published for the Nation's four geographic regions as defined by the Bureau of the Census. Paid rest periods were most common in the West at 82 percent, followed by the North Central region (72 percent), the South (69 percent), and the Northeast (49 percent).¹ The situation was reversed for paid lunch time. The incidence of paid lunch periods was most common in regions where paid rest breaks were least common. Fifteen percent of the full-time employees in the Northeast had paid lunch time, followed by the South (9 percent), North Central (7 percent), and the West (3 percent).

Goods- and service-producing industries

As with geographic differences, data for full-time employees in goods- and service-producing industries were also only published for 1993.² The survey found that employees in goods-producing establishments were more likely to have both paid lunch and paid rest benefits than employees in service-producing industries. Twice the proportion of goods-producing employees had paid lunch periods (12 percent) than service-producing

employees (6 percent). Paid rest time also was more common in goods-producing establishments, with 74 percent of employees receiving paid rest periods, compared with 63 percent of their counterparts in service-producing industries. A possible explanation for this difference is that union employees, who are concentrated in goods-producing industries, have a higher incidence of paid rest breaks than their non-union counterparts.

Other data on paid lunch and rest time

BLS also tabulated the incidence of employee benefit plans in small independent businesses.³ Although sharp differences were noted for some types of employee benefit plans, the incidence of paid rest and paid lunch time was virtually the same in small independent businesses as among small establishments as a whole.

BLS also examined benefit incidence among State and local governments. Employees of State governments were much more likely to receive formal paid rest time plans (72 percent) than were those of local governments (46 percent). The situation was reversed for paid lunch periods, where local government workers were three times more likely to have this benefit (13 percent) than were State government employees (4 percent). These patterns are largely due to the influence of teachers, who comprise a large proportion of the local government work force, and who are more likely than other employees to receive paid lunch periods but less likely to have paid rest breaks.

Eliminating the collection of data on paid lunch and rest benefits

The EBS is a study of individual benefits and benefit provisions, rather than a single output such as an index. As such, considerable latitude exists in the choice of data to be studied. In spite of this, strict

guidelines are followed and considerable care is taken when survey data changes are made. The choice of benefits and provisions are based on the employee and employer perceptions of a benefits' worth, the timeliness of the topic, the presence of varying characteristics to be tabulated, and the degree to which the benefit plans' incidence or details change over time. Finally, in deciding what data elements to include, the Bureau balances the usefulness of publishing the information against the costs of assembling the data.

Paid lunch and rest benefits were dropped from the survey because they did not meet several of these criteria. First, there was little interest from the public for the published data. Second, paid lunch and rest benefits are rarely in the news and infrequently discussed among policy makers. Third, data on the incidence and average minutes per day for both paid lunch

and paid rest were very consistent over time. As a result, the EBS was publishing nearly identical data survey after survey. Finally, by freeing resources used to collect and publish paid lunch and rest data, other benefits or benefit provisions that our users find more useful can be published.

Conclusion

The survey must constantly evolve to reflect the changing needs of data users. The elimination of paid lunch and rest benefits is such a reflection.

In addition, one of the goals of the emerging COMP2000 survey program (see related article on page 9 of this issue) is to monitor developments in the compensation field. Periodically, the Bureau may survey paid lunch and paid rest time to determine if these benefits have changed in their prevalence or in their characteristics.

Technical Note

Paid lunch and rest data have been collected since the inception of the Employee Benefits Survey in 1979. Initially, the survey compared Federal benefits with those in private industry, and its uses have expanded over the years. EBS data are now used to formulate policy, develop compensation packages, as well as in academic research. The survey also has many more and varied data users than in the past, including the business community, State and local governments, and research organizations.

Since 1990, the survey has published data on small private establishments and State and local governments for even-numbered years, and on medium and large private establishments for odd-numbered years. These benefits were last published for small private establishments and the State and local governments for 1992 and for 1993 for medium and large private establishments.

—Endnotes—

¹ Geographic regions are defined as follows: Northeast—Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont; South—Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia; North Central—Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ne-

braska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Wisconsin; West—Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming.

² Goods-producing industries include manufacturing, mining, and construction. Service-producing industries include transportation, communications, electric, gas, and sanitary services; wholesale trade; retail trade; finance, insurance, and real estate; and other services.

³ The survey of small private establishments includes two types of businesses, those that are independent, for example a dry cleaners, and those that are a segment of a larger organization, for example a sales office for a large national manufacturing firm. In general, the incidence of benefits (other than paid rest and lunch time) for small independent businesses was lower than the incidence of businesses that are part of a larger organization.