



# Police and Fire Sick Leave Abuse: Trends and Real-World Solutions

Using technology and policy changes to reduce  
sick leave abuse in police and fire departments

This report produced in partnership with:



## Trends

Police1 and FireRescue1 recently conducted reader surveys asking public safety personnel about the effect sick leave abuse has on operations, policies, and morale. The results were clear: Sick leave abuse is happening, and it is affecting staffing decisions and relationships inside departments as well as with public and municipal decision makers.

To combat the issues, police and fire departments are using intelligent scheduling software to better track personnel comp time. The trend data collected by the scheduling software can be used by departments to pinpoint the problem and then determine how policies can be adapted to further reduce the abuse of sick time.

**Both surveys showed that respondents see a need for a combination of policies, education, and software to combat widespread sick leave abuse at public safety agencies.**

## Police

The sick leave abuse survey conducted by Police1 found that more than 80% of respondents believed unnecessary sick leave affected operations, with most blaming entitlement, poorly written policies, and a lack of methods to monitor abuse as major contributors to sick leave abuse in their department.

There is no doubt that sick leave abuse has an effect on morale and a department's reputation. Nearly 90% of Police1 readers said sick leave abuse affects department morale and, when the news becomes public, community trust and the respect of municipal decision makers is lost.

## Fire

The sick leave abuse survey by FireRescue1 found similar results. About 70% of respondents said operations and staffing are moderately or very affected by unnecessary sick leave. As with the police surveyed, most firefighter respondents said entitlement, poorly written policies, and a lack of methods to prove there is sick leave abuse are to blame for the widespread problem.

For fire departments, more than 80% said sick leave abuse somewhat affects department morale, with most agreeing it hurts community trust when word gets out.

Both surveys showed that respondents see a need for a combination of policies, education, and software to combat widespread sick leave abuse at public safety agencies.

### Sick leave abuse affects employee morale and department integrity





## Police

The Madison Police Department protects 255,000 citizens and has 633 employees, with 450 of them being full-time commissioned personnel. In addition to patrol, it has special teams that include a drug unit, a gang unit, school resource officers, safety education officers, SWAT, and a special event team.

## Challenges

Previously, the department used a glorified Excel spreadsheet to track schedules, including vacation time and sick leave requests, said Lt. Tim Peregoy of the Madison Police Department. The data was entered into a spreadsheet after the department collected books with timesheets from five districts as well as from special teams and detectives.

Each week, the books would be brought to a central location so staff could divide and conquer the task: crunch the numbers and make staffing decisions. But, Peregoy said, by the time the books were collected, something on the schedule inevitably would change. Another concern was a lack of tracking, because vacation requests were written on paper slips and easily lost.

At the same time, personnel who didn't abuse the system knew sick leave and comp time abuse was happening around them. This impacted the morale of those who played by the book as they became disheartened by their department's lack of accountability policies and systems.

## Solutions

The department sought a software solution and found UKG TeleStaff™, a web-based solution used for staffing and scheduling. The solution's reporting features help administrators keep track of sick and vacation leave, with email alerts sent about those personnel who might be abusing the system.

UKG TeleStaff also helps administrators recognize patterns of behavior, Peregoy said. Administrators can look for whether employees take sick leave with their scheduled days off or at specific times of the year, such as when hunting season begins. This lets supervisors recognize a pattern before it gets out of control, and supervisors can then use data to adapt policies to stave off problems before they happen.

## Results

Before UKG TeleStaff, Peregoy said it took seven people working two to three days just to process vacation slips. Now it takes two people one day to complete the process at the pace of about 15 minutes a day.

The solution reduces departmental sick leave abuse by providing an accountability transparency program that can save money and improve morale issues both inside the department and with constituents, he said. Internet access means staff can access schedule updates — even when they are not at work.

It also keeps mistakes to a minimum, as users are given a series of mandatory prompts that must be filled out correctly before they can move to the next screen. This saves money as payroll errors have dropped dramatically, reducing staff time needed to fix them, Peregoy said. There's no more chasing down lost paper-based vacation slips either.



### Fire

**The Salt Lake City Unified Fire Authority protects 450 square miles and serves about one million people. It has 28 fire stations with 365 sworn personnel. Services include fire, EMS, hazmat, heavy rescue, swift water rescue, open dive rescue, paramedics, an arson squad, a bomb squad, and Utah Taskforce 1 — one of 28 special Urban Search & Rescue response teams serving under FEMA.**

## Challenges

The department tracked scheduling using a paper-based system resembling recipe cards in a plastic box, said Assistant Chief Mike Watson of the Salt Lake City Unified Fire Authority. Each index card was used to track personnel scheduling and contact information. The battalion chiefs for each of the 28 fire stations were in charge of scheduling and ran their shifts off data on the index cards.

Watson said sick leave abuse was slipping through the cracks because abusers may or may not have worked for the same battalion chief; they would call in sick at different stations depending on where they were scheduled. This wasn't tracked, so it was like having three different bosses that didn't talk to each other about staffing. This cost the department money and affected morale among those who didn't abuse the system.

## Solutions

To solve the issue of sick leave abuse, the department invested in UKG TeleStaff, which lets staff track all leave — sick, business, training, USAR deployments, and vacation. Once the solution was implemented, personnel were educated about the new system and how effective it is when tracking how they are using their comp time.

UKG TeleStaff also helped the department update its sick leave policies. Now, if employees need to call in sick at the last minute, they are encouraged to approach their chief officers with the request. A chief officer, using UKG TeleStaff, can ask how many hours a firefighter needs off — such as for a child's recital. The officer uses the solution to break comp time into blocks of time instead of just one 24-hour period. This flexibility now lets personnel approach chiefs honestly about the issues they are having, and it reduces the abuse of sick leave.

If there is a problem, both the chief and payroll receive regular reports about the status of sick leave on the books. An alert states the amount of sick leave taken and the amount left. The display is color-coded — sick leave is pink — so it catches the eye and helps display the big picture at a glance, Watson said.

## Results

UKG TeleStaff lets the department track sick leave information that, in the past, would have taken five people days to collect and complete. The department now tracks costs in real time and makes budget adjustments quickly instead of having a Q4 crisis.

Sick leave abuse is down and morale is up, Watson said. Before the department implemented UKG TeleStaff and personnel had the flexibility to take a few hours off last minute, the department had an average of six personnel off per day. It now averages four per day. This saves the department around \$1,000 per shift, which equates to an 18% savings to the overtime budget.

## Conclusion

Public safety agencies recognize sick leave abuse can negatively affect a department, from increasing labor costs to decreasing morale. Real-world examples show that when departments update their sick leave policies and implement software that incorporates policy rules, they can better monitor sick leave abuse.

Using these strategies, administrators can quickly reduce sick leave abuse in their department, thereby saving money while reducing morale issues with staff and with constituents.

## About UKG

At UKG (Ultimate Kronos Group), our purpose is people™. Built from a merger that created one of the largest cloud companies in the world, UKG believes organizations succeed when they focus on their people. As a leading global provider of HCM, payroll, HR service delivery, and workforce management solutions, UKG delivers award-winning Pro, Dimensions, and Ready solutions to help tens of thousands of organizations across geographies and in every industry drive better business outcomes, improve HR effectiveness, streamline the payroll process, and help make work a better, more connected experience for everyone. UKG has more than 13,000 employees around the globe and is known for an inclusive workplace culture. The company has earned numerous awards for culture, products, and services, including consecutive years on Fortune's *100 Best Companies to Work For* list. To learn more, visit [ukg.com](https://www.ukg.com).



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