

Labor Day: 40% don't use all of vacation

And although most of us are off today, some will toil

Citizen Staff Report

Vacation is a breath of fresh air for Bob Rodgers.

By day or night, potentially any day of the year, Rodgers deals with stench. He unclogs sewers for the Pima County Wastewater Management Department.

Rodgers operates one of the department's Vactors - a gigantic vehicle that pressure cleans clogged sewer lines and vacuums out the cause of blockages.

Vacation for Rodgers means taking off to the White Mountains for camping and trout fishing.

"I just like the cool, clean, fresh air," Rodgers commented, before heading off for emergency cleaning of a clogged sewer in the 4600 block of East Second Street. "In today's world, with all the stress and pressure, it's good to get away for a while and recharge your batteries."

That's what Labor Day is all about: Rewarding the people who make our economy tick with a day off. But some, such as Rodgers, keep plugging - or in his case, unplugging - away, to be rewarded with a day off later.

Although 40 percent of the people in the West don't take all of their vacation in any given year, according to a survey by Expedia.com, time off is an important part of working. It gives people time to reflect and rejuvenate.

"The subtle effects of stress pile up," said Barry Goldman, associate professor of policy and management at the University of Arizona's Eller College of Management. "Vacations give us an opportunity to escape from that stress for a while."

Vacations also are part of what makes a job attractive.

"It's an implicit part of the psychological contract employers have with employees," Goldman added. "Vacation recognizes that you have another life and that it is an important part of your life."

But at times, scheduling a vacation can be tough, as Pam Boyer-Pfersdorf, 48, has learned. Her Christmas vacation was cut short by the tsunami, which hit Dec. 26, and her Labor Day escape to the White Mountains was scrapped because of Hurricane Katrina. [compare?](#)

Boyer-Pfersdorf is director of operations at World Care, the Tucson humanitarian relief organization that is collecting and sending aid to New Orleans and Mississippi.

"Vacation time is to help myself so I can help others," she said. "It's a change of mind-set. Working in humanitarian aid is almost addictive."

Will Hixon, 28, who is in the concession business at UA, took his last vacation about two months ago, traveling to Hawaii.

"People need vacations to get some time off from what they are doing - even if they stay home or don't go far away," he said.

There's no law that says businesses have to give employees paid vacation, but most do to attract and keep good employees.

"It definitely is a benefit full-time employees want and expect to get," said Catherine Fillmore, president of the Society for Human Resources Management of Greater Tucson. "The negative is it's a cost to the company - no productivity. But if you don't offer vacation, you're not competitive in the marketplace."

Rick Guerra, 40, who has worked in the Tucson City Clerk's Office for years, prefers the city's vacation policy over those he had working eight years in the medical field. Scheduling and getting vacation time approved generally is not a problem, he said, although it's understood there are certain times when he won't get a vacation.

"During the election cycle, that month, no," he said.

Guerra banks his vacation time to take longer trips in the winter, and also keeps one week's worth in reserve - just in case.

"It's the break away from monotony, the everyday schedule, the rat race, if you will," Guerra said.

However, he added, "sometimes the vacation is just as busy - gathering everything, making sure the clothes are there, the tickets are there, did we make the reservations, did we forget the toothpaste."

Michael Sandoval, 42, a sales representative at Mutual of Omaha, said he likes to take his vacations just before big pushes to meet his productivity goals. He typically vacations one week in the San Diego-Disneyland realm and one week in Albuquerque-Santa Fe.

"If your vacation is timed right, you can not only recharge your batteries but also positively affect your production," Sandoval said.

Sergio Bravo, 19, of Tucson, works at Diamond Wireless at Tucson Mall. He said he took his last vacation in May, when he traveled to Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, for a week.

Bravo said he enjoys his job. Coming to work is easy because he likes the people and the mall environment. He also likes meeting new people, which his job in sales allows.

"But it's always nice to get some time off," he said. "It's important that you don't get burned out."

Some companies have strict vacation, sick day and holiday schedules. Others give employees some flexibility.

Sundt Construction provides paid time off, called PTO, instead of vacation. Rather than accruing vacation time, Sundt employees accrue paid time off, which can be used for vacation, sick time or just to run errands around town.

"I think it's great," said Charlie Boyd, a company spokesman. "It allows people to better manage the time they have off, not only for sickness but for planned vacations. The policy is a lot easier to administer and the employees seem to like it better. Whatever your reason for being gone is your business."

Some companies allow employees to accrue their vacations. If time off doesn't work one year, more time off may work the next.

"A lot of (employees) have vacation time on the books," said Jacci Barreras, vice president of business management for Chestnut Construction. "Some companies have a use-it-or-lose-it policy - we don't."

Barreras said there are many pressures that must be dealt with in the construction industry, such as safety issues and meeting project deadlines.

"People need time away from the job to rejuvenate themselves and spend added time with their families," she said.

For some, vacation time received may never be enough.

"I could always use more vacation, but I've been able to take vacation when I need it," said Gay Thompson, who has been employed with UA's finance department for 15 years. She gets 22 vacation days each year.

She may visit family in Texas a couple times a year or take long weekends, but she always holds some in reserve.

I don't usually take the full 22 days," Thompson said. "I like to keep my vacation period up, so if something comes up, I have days to take off."

Citizen Staff Writers Teya Vitu, Oscar Abeyta, Garry Duffy, David Pittman and LaMonica Everett-Haynes contributed to this article.