

Update to ‘Wounded Warriors Leave’

In the September/October Contract Talk, we wrote about a new category of leave available to certain veterans called “Wounded Warriors Leave.” This new category of leave allows eligible employees to have credited and use up to 104 hours of leave to undergo medical treatment for a service-connected disability rated at 30 percent or more.

During the September/October timeframe, when that article was published, the Postal Service informed NALC this benefit would be extended only to eligible new employees hired on or after Nov. 5, 2016, as well as employees who leave the Postal Service’s employment or take military leave to participate in active-duty military service, sustain a service-connected disability rating of at least 30 percent during that military leave or service, and then return directly from that leave or service on or after Nov. 5, 2016.

On Nov. 15, the Postal Service notified NALC that it would extend this benefit to current employees as well, rather than only the employees described above. Accordingly, all employees who were on the rolls as of Nov. 4, and who otherwise meet the eligibility requirements of the Wounded Warriors Federal Leave Act of 2015, could use up to 104 hours of Wounded Warriors Leave during the 12-month period beginning Nov. 5. Additionally, any eligible employees who used leave for a condition covered by the act prior to when the Postal Service notified NALC of the change may request to have their leave converted to Wounded Warriors Leave.

In November, the Postal Service also released a new Management Instruction (EL-510-2016-8) setting forth its policy guidelines and standard procedures for administering Wounded Warriors Leave. The updated eligibility requirements outlined in the new Management Instruction state:

Eligibility General

All classifications of career and non-career Postal Service employees are eligible for Wounded Warriors Leave if all of the following applies:

- a. They meet one of the eligibility requirements provided under Eligible Employees, and
- b. They have not previously established eligibility for Wounded Warriors Leave.

Eligible employees are entitled to only one Twelve-Month Eligibility Period in connection with Postal Service employment.

Eligible Employees

To be eligible, you must meet the criteria of one of the following:

1. A career or non-career employee:
 - a. With a full-time, part-time or non-traditional schedules;
 - b. Who fulfills one of the following:
 - i. Is on the rolls as of November 4, 2016;
 - ii. Is a non-career employee on a required break in service (five or six days, as appropriate), on November 4, 2016; or
 - iii. Begins serving his or her first appointment on or after November 5, 2016; and

- c. Who has a single or combined service-connected disability rating of 30 percent or more.
2. Employees who:
 - a. Leave the Postal Service’s employment to participate in active duty military service;
 - b. Return directly from that military service to a career or non-career appointment on or after November 5, 2016; and
 - c. Have sustained a single or combined service-connected disability rating of 30 percent or more that was incurred during the employee’s immediate absence.
3. Employees who:
 - a. Take military leave from the Postal Service to participate in active-duty military service;
 - b. Return directly from that military leave on or after November 5, 2016; and
 - c. During military leave sustain a single or combined service-connected disability rating of 30 percent or more that was incurred during the employee’s military leave.

Wounded Warriors Leave expires at the end of an eligible employee’s 12-month eligibility period. This happens regardless of the employee’s actual Wounded Warriors Leave balance. If the employee leaves the Postal Service at any time during or after the expiration of the 12-month eligibility period, any remaining leave will not be reinstated, carried over or paid out, except as permitted by OPM regulations if the employee transfers to another federal agency, or otherwise permitted by the Postal Service’s Management Instruction.

An employee’s supervisor is responsible for approving or disapproving requests for Wounded Warriors Leave by signing PS Form 3971 and returning a copy to the employee. In addition, to verify that Wounded Warriors Leave requested by an employee is appropriately used for the treatment of a service-connected disability, the requesting employee must provide proof from the health care provider that the employee used the leave to receive treatment for a covered disability. The Postal Service has created a form to be used for this verification. The new form is PS Form 5980, Treatment Verification for Wounded Warriors Leave.

A copy of the Management Instruction outlining the complete policy guidelines established for the administration of Wounded Warriors Leave has been made available on the NALC website at nalc.org. The document, labeled M-01881 in the Materials Reference System (MRS), can be found on the Military Veterans, Contract Administration Unit and City Delivery pages. PS Form 5980 can be found on those pages as well.

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