

County Civil Service Unit To Crack Down On Sick Leave Abuse

By Len Klempnauer
Sentinel Staff Writer

The Santa Cruz county civil service commission, which is attempting to crack down on employees who abuse their sick leave privileges, received a report from County Personnel Director Charles Shean this week that attempts to solve the problem.

Shean pointed out that county employees do not abuse the sick leave privileges anymore than do employees in private business or other governments. However, he said known cases of abuses exist, and the commission hopes to eliminate them.

Shean says in his report, "The abuse of sick leave is a problem which plagues not only private industry but the public agency as well. As originally intended, paid sick leave can provide an invaluable means of protection for the employee against an unexpected illness or accident.

"It should be the responsibility of both management and the employee to see that sick leave is not abused, and that it is not thought of as just another form of vacation.

"The cost of sick leave to a company or jurisdiction can be considerable — even when it is used legitimately. Naturally, this cost is multiplied unnecessarily when sick leave is taken indiscriminately.

"There have been many programs and controls developed, but no one plan will offer a panacea."

According to statistical information compiled by the personnel department, the average sick leave taken per employee per year in 1963 was 7.2 days.

This average compares favorably with averages in other areas' Shean adds. In 1961, the social security administration estimated an average sick leave usage of seven days per year for wage and salary workers in private employment. The same study showed 7.5 days for state and local government employees and eight days for federal government employees. Other studies have shown that the average public employee uses five or six days sick leave per year — usually a day or so at a time.

The problem, according to Shean's report, is to determine when sick leave is being abused.

"It is entirely possible that seven or more days may actually be a number brought about for valid reasons," he declares.

"The personnel department realizes fully that excessive use of sick leave by a few can make the over-all picture look poor. That is why it is important that both management and the employee work together in restricting sick leave use to legitimate reasons."

The approximate cost to the county in 1963 for sick leave was \$100,000, according to the personnel director. The average sick leave per employee per department was 5.5 days. But 10 departments averaged seven days or more.

Departments which averaged seven days and above "employ more than 471 employees or about 60 per cent of the total number working for the county," states the report.

"To say that all or even the majority of these cases were not valid would be quite a generalization.

"However, a sample check of some departments shows that the majority of absences was for one day only, and that many fell on either a Monday or Friday," Shean says.

Shean offers the following suggestions as methods other firms and agencies have used to cut down sick leave:

1. Give extra vacation or cash payment for unused sick leave or a combination of the two.

2. Allow accumulation of sick leave to a maximum of 120 days so when an employee retires the value of the accumulated leave is transferred to a fund. The fund would allow the retired employee to continue membership in the group insurance plan. To be eligible, an employee must have worked for the county at least 10 years, and have accumulated at

each employee. Employees who appear to be obvious offenders should be called in to explain their side of the story.

3. If there is no indication that the employee will do better, he should be referred to the department head or personnel department for appropriate action.

The commission at its meeting Tuesday night took no action on Shean's report.

Pierre Salinger To Speak Twice In SC Area

Pierre Salinger, Democratic candidate for United States senator from California, will speak tomorrow in two Santa Cruz area locations.

He will talk and answer questions at a special breakfast to be held in The Riverside at 8 a.m.

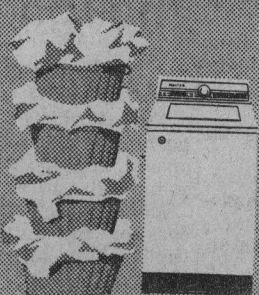
The breakfast is open to the public. Reservations at \$1.50 each may be made by calling The Riverside, 423-5730.

Salinger also will speak at the Cabrillo college little theater at 11 a.m.

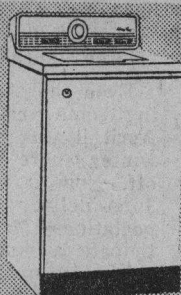
Salinger, a 1947 graduate of the University of San Francisco, worked on the Chronicle from 1942 to 1955 as a reporter and

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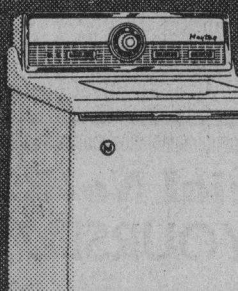


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value of the accumulated leave is transferred to a fund. The fund would allow the retired employee to continue membership in the group insurance plan. To be eligible, an employee must have worked for the county at least 10 years and have accumulated at least 80 days sick leave.

3. Initiate a program of visits by medical personnel to persons who call in sick to discourage those staying home for no reason.

4. Pay only half or three quarters of the full salary to employees who are ill instead of full salary.

5. Make approval of paid sick leave the function of department heads but with no accrual of sick leave and no maximum allowance. The department head need assure himself only that the reasons for sick leave are valid.

6. Require employees to check in through an employee clinic before returning to sick leave.

"Obviously no one program or set of rules is going to completely control absences. . . There still will be those employees who will continue to abuse sick leave," Shean continues.

He recommends that the sick leave records be administered by line supervisors at the department level who are the most familiar with the employee.

To curtail sick leave abuses, Shean recommends that the following program be instituted:

1. The advantages of accumulating sick leave for unforeseeable illness or accident should be explained fully to new employees. Similarly, the disadvantages of indiscriminately using up sick leave should be explained.

2. Records' clerks in each department should keep a close check on the sick leave record of