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Business: Jobs
Busy U.S. workers giving up vacation

By Luladey B. Tadesse
GANNETT NEWS SERVICE

As the year winds down, many workers will scramble to use up vacation days. But a growing number of Americans — nearly a third — will end up forgoing their vacation days because they have too much work or responsibility to take off.

"With the downsizing and companies being leaner in terms of the staffing ... companies are trying to do more with less, and people are busier than ever," said George Faulkner, a health and benefits principal at Mercer Human Resource Consulting. "It is more difficult to take the time off because it affects the work, and employees tend to feel guilty about it."

Americans are likely to give back 574 million vacation days in 2006, worth about \$75.72 billion based on workers' average hourly wage, according to Expedia.com's 2006 Vacation Deprivation survey. On average, Americans will give up four vacation days this year, one more than last year.

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The www.Expedia.com survey, which included the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Germany, France and Australia, found that Americans have the least amount of vacation — 14 days — and forgo more of it.

The French had the most vacation with 39 days off, and 40 percent of them took three- to four-week vacations during the summer, compared with the one-week getaway that 40 percent of Americans take.

Experts say Americans are not fully taking advantage of their vacations because they are more insecure about their jobs.

Sometimes workers simply want the overtime. But the extra hours may cost them their health, and in the long term, affect the quality of their work, experts said.

Some companies have developed flexible vacation policies that allow workers to carry over vacation days into the following year or have it accrue.

"We do have a carry-over policy," said Bill Benintende, spokesman for Wilmington Trust. "Having the policy gives you some flexibility if for whatever reason you can't use all the time you have got."

"A company, if it doesn't encourage people to take vacation, is really shooting itself in the foot," said Mark Sincevich, a work life consultant based in Bethesda, Md. "People are going to be burned out and leave the company."

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