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ABSENTEEISM AT CTA DROPS 22 PERCENT OVER LAST TWO YEARS

Better management leads to more than \$10M million savings compared to 2011

Employee absenteeism rates at the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) have dropped dramatically in 2012 and 2013 due to new management initiatives aimed at reducing unnecessary time off, Mayor Rahm Emanuel and CTA officials announced today.

The reduced absenteeism—due to better management of frequent causes of absenteeism such as sick leave and job-related injuries—is on pace to save the CTA more than \$10 million compared to 2011. That year, the CTA bore \$40 million in additional costs due to absenteeism, but the new strategies for curbing absenteeism have reduced that to below \$30 million a year.

“City taxpayers deserve a government that’s accountable with measurable results,” said Mayor Emanuel. “We are setting higher standards and expectations for our employees across the board because taxpayers deserve an efficient, transparent government that is working hard to improve the city.”

“We have taken a number of steps to ensure that we keep absenteeism down, which saves the agency money and ultimately helps us provide the best service possible to CTA customers,” added CTA President Forrest Claypool.

The first six months of 2013 showed an average, agency-wide absenteeism rate of 5.5 percent, compared to 6.4 percent in 2012 (a reduction of 13 percent) and 7.1 percent in 2011 (a total reduction of 22.2 percent). So far in 2013, CTA has seen 72,024 days of work absences compared to 77,150 for the first six months of 2012 and 88,320 in the first six months of 2011.

May and June of 2013 showed among the lowest rates of absenteeism in recent agency history, with the overall rate falling to below 5 percent.

All major drivers of absenteeism are down in the first six months of 2013 compared to the first six months of 2011: days lost to injuries are down 25.1 percent and sick time is down 17.6 percent. All of CTA's largest departments saw drops in absenteeism, including bus and rail operations, bus and rail maintenance, and administration.

In March and April of 2012, the CTA implemented a number of management initiatives designed to better track, analyze and address absenteeism—including closer reviews of time-off claims, consistent discipline for not following rules, and improved safety training to help avoid injuries. Additionally, managers are now held accountable for not addressing employees who are abusing the system, or for not consistently addressing absenteeism cases.

CTA has cracked down on employees taking sick days on Mondays and Fridays, as well as warm weather or snowy/extremely cold weather days. CTA's efforts have reduced that practice, Claypool said, but there is still additional room for addressing the issue even more consistently and swiftly.

CTA also expanded safety training for employees, with a focus on avoiding injuries by using proper techniques to lift, climb and perform other physical activities, as well as analyzing and re-enacting events that led to injuries.

"In the same way we work to ensure our trains and buses are operated in the most efficient and cost-effective way, we are taking steps to ensure that our absenteeism is managed effectively," Claypool said. "Our goal is to ensure that employees are taking time off for legitimate reasons and that we limit unnecessary absenteeism, which both burdens the employees who are following the rules and affects the service our customers rely on."

Lower absenteeism leads to cost savings for the CTA, because the agency can avoid paying for additional bus drivers and train operators to fill in for absent employees.

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