

Are sick leave credits affected by upcoming changes?

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I am planning to retire sometime next year and am wondering if the formation of the new benefit plan will have any bearing on my retirement benefits?

Do you mean retirement benefits or severance benefits? I ask because retirement benefits - health and welfare - are provided through your pension plan once you retire. And just like the existing employer run health and welfare benefit plan, the new jointly-administered benefit plan will be for active members only.

Thanks for clarifying, I do mean the severance benefits. Will there be any changes to those benefits because of the new benefit program? I'm counting on that money and after decades of dedicated service I don't want to see those benefits disappear just before I can access them.

No, there will be no changes to the accumulated severance allowance or the 40 per cent cash-in of sick leave credits. These two clauses in the collective agreement provide the bulk of your severance package at retirement and nothing involving the new health and welfare benefit trust will have any bearing on these benefits for retiring members. In fact, the collective agreement runs until 2019 and so the current language of the agreement will remain unaltered until that time at least.

Okay, that's good to know. The reason why I'm asking is I recall there were bargaining discussions about the sick leave system and possibly doing away with the sick leave banks. Am I right?

Yes, there were discussions some years ago about modifying the sick leave coverage but the talks were exploratory, and in the end, the discussion went nowhere. For someone like yourself who enjoyed good health the sick leave system works great and you will be rewarded with a valuable payout on retirement. But the flaw with relying solely on individual accumulated sick leave banks is members battling a chronic illness can exhaust their sick leave banks before being eligible for long term disability benefits. So the discussion was about finding a hybrid system that would maintain a lot of the existing features, including the severance cash-in of sick leave credits, but also provide short-term disability coverage for those that need it. In the end the idea was abandoned because the price was too high. At no time was the cash-in of sick leave credits in jeopardy then - and they aren't now.

Best wishes for a long and healthy retirement!

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