

VOLUNTARY HOURS REDUCTION (VHR) PROGRAM 2020-2022
Frequently Asked Questions

1) Q: Who is eligible for Voluntary Hours Reduction (VHR)?

Permanent full time/part time (above 0.5 FTE) and probationary employees that are represented by employee groups who have authorized VHR for their membership and the Salary Resolution are eligible for VHR.

2) Q: Are all County employees participating in VHR?

Participation is at the discretion of Department Head (which includes designee throughout this document) and must be balanced against the operational needs of the department. Only permanent full time/part time (above 0.5 FTE) and probationary employees that are represented by employee groups who have authorized VTO for their membership are eligible to request VHR.

3) Q: When may VHR be taken?

VHR is subject to approval and may be taken at pre-arranged intervals or time periods, from January 12, 2021 through June 27, 2022.

4) Q: Does VHR affect my seniority or service hours?

Yes. Eligibility for merit increases, and seniority hours will be based upon time in paid status. Completion of probation will be based upon time in paid status (excluding overtime).

5) Q: What kind of work schedule can I have?

Employees may not work a 9/80 schedule while participating in the VHR Program. Employee and Department Head will arrive at a reduced schedule that allocates time worked as evenly as possible during the two weeks of the pay period so as not to incur statutory overtime (Fair Labor Standards Act overtime is hours worked in excess of 40 hours weekly). VHR schedules should align with daily hours provisions in the employees applicable MOU/Salary Resolution so as not to incur daily overtime. Employees schedule and work rules in the County's payroll and timekeeping systems must be updated to accurately reflect the applicable FTE changes under the VHR program.

6) Q: Does VHR reduce my benefits?

Possibly. Pro-ration for County contributions towards medical, dental, vision, basic life insurance, and Retiree HRA will be applied according to your specific MOU or Salary Resolution.

7) Q: Does VHR reduce my "Cash Allowance"?

Yes. Cash Allowance is paid on the hours in pay status (up to 80 regular hours) and the employee will be working fewer hours during the VHR program period. For example, if an employee works 45 regular hours during the two week pay period, they may receive cash allowance for those 45 hours, from a rate of \$0-\$3.45/hour, depending on the applicable MOU/Salary Resolution.

8) Q: How is Compensatory Time Off (CTO) cash out affected?

Cash out of CTO is not available to all employee groups. Groups with CTO cash out will be unaffected by VHR.

9) Q: How does VHR affect holiday pay?

While taking VHR, employees will receive pro-rated holiday pay in accordance with the applicable MOU/Salary Resolution.

10) Q: I'm extra help. Will I be eligible for VHR?

No, extra help employees are not eligible to participate in the VHR program. Extra help employees are also not eligible to backfill for employees participating in the VHR program except in a Sonoma County Board declared emergency.

11) Q: Will federal/state taxes and FICA be reduced with VHR, or remain consistent with pre VHR deductions?

VHR reduces gross pay and may result in a reduction of federal, state, and FICA taxes. Employees should consult with a tax professional for their specific situation. Employees can submit updated Federal W-4 and State DE-4 income tax withholding forms at any time.

12) Q: How does VHR affect or apply to leave without pay (LWOP) and/or FMLA leave?

Employees who are not in a paid status are not eligible to apply for VHR. Employees participating in VHR, who go on approved leave, will have leave benefits applied based upon their reduced FTE hours under VHR and administered in accordance with the provisions of the applicable benefit program. Details on LWOP for permanent full-time/part-time employees can be found in the applicable MOU/Salary Resolution.

13) Q: If I am assigned by my supervisor to work hours above my reduced hours schedule, am I paid for those hours?*

*An employee on VHR should not be assigned to work in excess of their VHR FTE or overtime, except in the case of a Sonoma County Board declared emergency. In the event an employee is assigned additional hours or overtime, the following conditions apply**:*

Non-exempt employees (hourly employees eligible for overtime) and Exempt employees eligible for non-statutory overtime

- *Non-exempt employees will be paid for all hours worked. Overtime will be calculated as specified in the applicable Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or Salary Resolution.*
- *Exempt employees who work over their VHR schedule will be paid at their hourly rate for hours worked up to 80 hours in a pay period and applicable non-statutory overtime based on their applicable MOU.*

Exempt management

- *Exempt management who work above their VHR schedule will be paid at their hourly rate for hours worked up to 80 in a pay period.*
- *Exempt management employees in the VHR program who work more than 80 hours in a pay period are not eligible for overtime, unless approved by the Board during a Board declared emergency, per the Salary Resolution and applicable MOU's.*

***Employees should always refer to the applicable MOU or Salary Resolution regarding overtime.*

14) Q: Is VHR truly voluntary?

Yes. VHR requires agreement between the employee and Department Head.

15) Q: Must VHR be used prior to accrued leaves?

No, VHR is a separate agreement of a reduced work schedule and is not related to the request, approval and use of accrued vacation, vacation savings plan, comp time, floating holiday or supervisory leave or any other applicable authorized leaves.

16) Q: Can accrued leaves be used with VHR and overtime?

VHR is a reduction in your FTE. Employees may use accrued leaves for absences to meet their VHR FTE. Accrued leaves may not be used if it causes the employee to exceed their VHR FTE.

Example 1: employee has a VHR FTE of 0.75 (or 60 hours). Employee works 70 regular hours during the pay period. The employee may not use accrued leaves as any use of accrued leaves would put the employee over their FTE. Use of accruals over FTE is considered pension spiking.

Example 2: Employee has a VHR FTE of 0.75 (or 60 hours). Employee works 50 regular hours and has 5 OT hours due to daily OT and took a day off. The employee would need to use 10 hours of accrued leaves to meet their FTE for time off during the pay period.

17) Q: Can VHR be revoked?

Yes. The Department Head or designee, for any reason, with a minimum of two weeks' notice to the employee, may revoke VHR. The last day of VHR must coincide with the last day of a pay period (i.e. the employee must be returned to their regular FTE on the first day of a pay period).

- 18) Q: What is the smallest increment of reduction to an employee's FTE that may be requested for VHR?**

One hour.

- 19) Q: Are there restrictions placed on the department when they agree to approve VHR?**

Yes. In order to maximize the savings from VHR, departments are agreeing to not use overtime, (daily or biweekly) part-time staff, temporary staff, or extra help to backfill time taken off for VHR.

- 20) Q: Will Voluntary Hours Reduction (VHR) salary savings save jobs?**

Potentially, depending on the level of participation, savings from VHR could help reduce the need for staff reductions in some departments.