



RRB News

U.S. Railroad Retirement Board

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Benefit Rate Increase for Railroad Unemployment and Sickness Benefits

The maximum daily benefit rate payable for claims under the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act increases to \$56 from \$55 in the new benefit year, which begins July 1, 2004. Benefits are normally paid for the number of days of unemployment or sickness over four in 14-day registration periods, so maximum benefits for biweekly claims will total \$560.

During the first 14-day claim period in a benefit year, benefits are payable for each day of unemployment or sickness in excess of seven, rather than four, which, in effect, provides a one-week waiting period. Initial sickness claims must also begin with four consecutive days of sickness. However, only one waiting period is required during any period of continuing unemployment or sickness, even if that period continues into a subsequent benefit year. Claimants already on the rolls will, therefore, normally not be required to serve another waiting period because of the onset of the new benefit year.

To qualify for normal railroad unemployment or sickness benefits, an employee must have had railroad earnings of at least \$2,800 in calendar year 2003, not counting more than \$1,120 for any month. Those who were first employed in the rail industry in 2003 must also have at least five months of creditable railroad service in 2003.

Under certain conditions, employees with ten or more years of service, who do not qualify in the new benefit year on the basis of their 2003 earnings, may still be able to receive benefits after June 30, 2004. Ten-year employees who received normal benefits in the benefit year ending June 30, 2004, might still be eligible for extended benefits, and ten-year employees may be eligible for accelerated benefits if they have rail earnings of at least \$2,825 in 2004, not counting earnings of more than \$1,130 a month.

(More)

Application forms for unemployment and sickness benefits may be obtained from railroad employers, railroad labor organizations, any Railroad Retirement Board office, or the Board's Web site at www.rrb.gov. As an alternative to applying for unemployment benefits through the mail, unemployment claimants can instead file electronically through the Board's Web site. This service can be accessed by visiting the Board's Web site and clicking on "MainLine Services" for directions on establishing an RRB Internet Services account. **Employees are encouraged to initiate an online account while still employed so the account is established if they ever need to apply for these benefits or use other RRB Internet services.** After a claimant files an Internet application for unemployment benefits, the Board will mail biweekly claim forms to the claimant for completion. Although claimants cannot currently file their biweekly claims over the Internet, the Board is planning to add this service and other online services in the future.

Claimants with questions about unemployment or sickness benefits should contact the nearest Board office. Most Board offices are open to the public from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except on Federal holidays.

Claimants can find the address and phone number of the Board office serving their area, and also get information about their claims and benefit payments, by calling the toll-free RRB Help Line at 1-800-808-0772. The RRB Help Line is an automated telephone service available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Field office locations can also be found on the Board's Web site.

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