

Labour & Employment

Why working from home might mean going Dutch | Marcel Strigberger

By **Marcel Strigberger**



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(October 23, 2020, 2:33 PM EDT) -- Who pays for the toilet paper in Holland? I'm sure many of us were wondering about this question. We are talking about whether or not employers should compensate employees working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic for consumption during work hours, of items such as toilet paper, coffee, tea and other such baubles of extravagance.

To examine the question let's see what the NIBUD, FNV and AWWN have to say. (Little doubt we are all familiar with these Dutch organizations. They're obvious as KLM). But for those who of us who are not 100 per cent sure what these household names are and cannot wait to find out, I will explain shortly.

Authorities in Holland funded research for a family finances institution called NIBUD which concluded that employers should pay a share for these items as they are essential for the employees to do their job. NIBUD even says there is no problem doing the calculations, even including the cost of extra heating and hydro and depreciation costs of your desk and chair. They suggest a bonus of an average of about two Euros/day, being roughly three Canadian loonies. The government has already start applying this wisdom, retroactive to March.

The first problem I see is how does NIBUD do the math with such ease? We are talking some privacy issues here. I would like to think that the toilet paper that happens in my house stays in my house (figuratively speaking). Without going into more detail, I for one would tell them to keep their two Euros.

I also question the accuracy and veracity of the study. We all know there have been shortages on and off, of paper products. Where is the fairness in compensating the employees when the product was unavailable? And even when available, at large retailers there are house brands which are cheaper than the name brands. Why should the guy who buys Kirkland tissue get the same consideration as the person who loads up on Cashmere? (Kirkland comes from COSTCO. No translation necessary).

According to media reports, spokesman Jannes van der Velde of the Dutch employers' association, AWWN, notes that NIBUD's study does not take into account the savings employees reap by working from home. We are talking extra free time by avoiding commuting, less wardrobe requirements and otherwise absolutely necessary daily expenditures incurred if you do leave home, such as a Tim Hortons double double. (I added this one. Not sure if van der Velde would).

He says employers are already hard hit. There should be the appropriate offset. I agree. Where's the justice?

José Kager on behalf of the country's largest labour union, the FNV, of course is gung-ho about the deal, noting that many workers must still show up for work, such as those in the Heineken breweries. This observation is particularly useful as I actually wondered whether Heineken would be offering its workers the option of brewing from home.

In a story reported by Reuters, she adds that as for those employees otherwise working from home,

there are "structural ongoing costs." The inclusion of the word, "structural" concerns me. I'd hate to be back in practice again and have my assistant call me frantically advising me that while she was zooming in a meeting with others to set up an examination for discovery date, her roof collapsed: "The assessment of my share of the damage will follow." To boot she was also having a coffee. Egad!

Actually, the question did arise in Holland whether employers would also have to fund items such a productivity-enhancing cappuccino machine.

Interior Ministry spokesman Jeroen van Velzen said no. The compensation was limited to the things needed to be able to perform your work. Phew!

I guess this gets us back to the toilet paper. We have come full circle, or rather full roll.

Marcel Strigberger retired from his Greater Toronto Area litigation practice and continues the more serious business of humorous author and speaker. Visit www.marcelshumour.com. Follow him @MarcelHumour.

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