

## The ADVOCATE

# Stretching the holidays: Some employers offer day after as paid time off

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When Christmas and New Year's Day fall midweek, companies respond in several ways, a survey found. Both holidays this year are on Thursdays, and more than half of 106 companies surveyed are giving employees Dec. 26 as a paid day off, according to two Stamford-based firms, OperationsInc and Performance-Solutions-Group Inc. About a third are giving Jan. 2 as paid time off.

"The argument from most employees is, 'What the heck am I going to get done?'" OperationsInc Chief Executive Officer David Lewis said. "But there is so much we don't get done in the workplace on busy days that a nice quiet day in the office isn't necessarily a bad thing."

Bill McKee, a spokesman for Xerox, which has headquarters in Norwalk, said Dec. 26 is a companywide holiday but said the office will be open Jan. 2. "We try to take in the effectiveness of getting the work done, but also our employees, so they can spend time with their families," McKee said.

Most businesses provide eight paid holidays a year, Lewis said, including Memorial Day, Fourth of July, Labor Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day. Many companies offer the day after Thanksgiving as the seventh paid holiday, and the eighth day tends to be a filler day, he said.

"It's a real challenge for businesses," Lewis said. "In talking with our clients, the issue was productivity. Can we essentially run a business effectively with two solid weeks of three work days?" Despite concerns for productivity, the recession has had little impact on holiday schedules, Lewis said.

Kris Kagle, a spokesman for UBS in Stamford, said the schedule usually is set the preceding fall. UBS employees, for example, already know the holiday schedule for 2009.

The other popular option for the days after holidays is allowing employees to use accrued vacation time, personal days or floating holidays, Lewis said.

In Stamford, about 15 percent of companies surveyed said Dec. 26 will be a floating holiday - not companywide, but employees can use it as a day off. About 17 percent will offer Jan. 2 as a floating holiday, according to the survey. Carol Wallace, a spokeswoman for Pitney Bowes in Stamford, said the office is open the Fridays after Christmas and New Year's, but employees have flexibility with their days off so they can elect when to come in. "I took the week of Dec. 8 off because my family happens to be local," Wallace said. "So I don't mind filling in around the holidays."

About 20 percent of the companies surveyed responded, from sectors such as technology, health care, real estate, marketing, finance, manufacturing and retail, Lewis said. All 106 companies were in Fairfield County or the New York metropolitan area.