

Employee Wellness Programs Benefit from Federal Bail Out

Your worksite wellness program just got a little boost from the financial bailout bill congress recently passed. Buried in the bill is a new law that states that employees who regularly bike to work can receive up to \$20 a month, tax-free, in order to offset the costs of buying, maintaining, repairing and storing their bike. On top of the environmental and health benefits that come from using the bike lane, biking to work now incurs financial benefits as well. This benefit is offered under the “qualified transportation fringe benefits” as part of a movement to encourage alternative transportation to work.

Effective January 1, 2009, employers will have the ability to offer this incentive to their employees in a way that works best for their company. Any company, large or small, may participate by establishing a program within the provided guidelines. The law says that eligible employees are those who “regularly” use their bikes to commute to and from work and who are not currently receiving any other transportation fringe benefits. Employees who ride to work may be reimbursed for reasonable expenses of up to \$20 a month at anytime during the year in which they participate. Although the total is not to exceed \$240 each year, employers and employees may decide how, when, and for what purposes, the money will be distributed.

With this new bill, employees can receive tax-free dollars to offset biking costs and employers will save money on both Federal and State income taxes, and get other payroll advantages. The health benefits employees acquire from riding a bike such as lowered stress levels, enhanced mood and better focus, will translate into company productivity and lower health care costs. In addition, employers will be able to provide more competitive benefits packages and gain support from their employees which will increase company morale.

If you are unable to hit the road at this time, you may want to look into other benefits provided to those who “go green.” This same bill also provides incentives for anyone who can decrease the wear and tear on the environment by limiting the cars on the road. For any employee who uses public transportation or other energy saving means to get to and from work, transportation fringe benefits will fund your efforts as well. In 2009, employers will be offering transit or commuter benefits of up to \$120 a month and qualified parking benefits of up to \$230 a month for any who participate. When combined with the additional payment of not having to sit in traffic and arriving at work stress free, the return should be enough for any commuter to consider giving it a try!

Anyone interested can go to the websites below for more information, or contact your employer directly.

1. <http://www.bikeleague.org/news/100708faq.php>
2. <http://www.accorservicesusa.com/services/CommuterCheck.aspx>
3. <http://www.groom.com/documents/bicyclearticle.pdf>
4. http://blumenauer.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=817&Itemid=167

WellSteps is a turnkey wellness program focused on helping companies reduce employee expenses by helping employees adopt and maintain healthy behaviors.

www.WellSteps.com