

Injured on the Job

A key reason why most IAM baggage handlers at Northwest Airlines feel passionately about keeping our union is the protection we receive when we are injured on the job.

When an injury is minor, a strained muscle, a bumped head, there is little difference between Delta policies and the IAM contract. The worker goes home for a day or two and comes back on light duty until they are healed. Employees at both airlines get OJI pay. The Northwest worker gets 100% of their pay, but it is taxed. The Delta worker gets 66.6% pay, but it is not taxed. Depending on tax status, the Northwest worker might come out ahead by a little.

The big difference occurs when the injury is more serious. Because of the nature of our work (lifting bags, twisting, pushing) knees, shoulders, backs and necks get damaged over the years. Repairing these injuries often takes extensive surgery, requiring extensive time away from work. Sometimes it means the worker can no longer perform his/her duties as a baggage handler.

Let's compare what would happen when a 15 year full time worker at either airline has to have a disc in their back replaced and can't come back to work on the ramp.

The IAM member will have accrued 180 days of OJI pay during 15 years. The Delta worker is capped at 130 days. That's 10 weeks extra for the IAM member. If the IAM member had 30 years, he could have as much as 46 weeks more than the Delta worker.

The Delta worker also has to use Paid Personal Time first and Certified Time if they have any. The IAM member uses OJI time before sick time or vacation time, thereby preserving those accruals longer.

He/she also continues to accrue sick, vacation and OJI time while out on injury.

Once all accruals are gone, we can see an even more pronounced difference. For the injured IAM member, Long Term Disability usually kicks in once accruals are exhausted. The waiting period is never longer than 90 days. For the Delta worker, there is a 180 day waiting period. The IAM worker receives 66% of his/her pay. The Delta worker gets 50% and the maximum time a Delta worker can receive benefits is 6 months. An IAM member can receive benefits for 36 months. After 6 months the Delta worker has no insurance. The IAM worker has insurance for the full 36 months. If the IAM worker is a few years from retirement, LTD is usually extended until the worker retires.

One final difference is that IAM members don't have to face ESIS or Sedgewick (the third party outsiders hired by Delta to administer insurance and OJI) alone when there is a problem. IAM members have trained union reps and attorneys who are familiar with our contract available to help them. And everything we have is guaranteed by Article 18 and Article 27 of our contract. Delta workers' benefits can be changed at any time. (All Delta figures from ACS Pay and Benefit Comparison 11/20/08)

