

## Cities differ on who's essential, who's not

Among Tampa, St. Pete and Clearwater, pay policies on city workers depend on duties.

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In Tampa and St. Petersburg, all city workers have been deemed essential. In Clearwater, some city workers are essential, and some are not.

But those are just words. No matter how the cities characterize them, all three of Tampa Bay's largest municipalities have divided employees into those who do critical work and those who don't in the time of the coronavirus.

And Clearwater is compensating its essential employees very differently from its two larger regional peers.

Starting this week, hourly staffers in Clearwater with essential duties were given two weeks of time-and-a-half emergency pay. Salaried essential staffers were given their regular salaries, plus an hour of vacation time for every two hours they worked. That's according to an email sent to city staffers March 26 from City Manager Bill Horne and Human Resources Director Jennifer Poirrier.

Essential employees accounted for a little more than half of Clearwater's 1,800 or so staffers, Horne said.

Nonessential workers are being asked to stay home through April 10, but nearly all will be paid in full - part-timers included. One exception: employees who may have to go into quarantine due to recent international travel. They will have to dip into their existing paid sick days in order to self-quarantine, the city email said.

There is a major caveat to all of this: After April 10, the city will re-evaluate this pay structure, city spokeswoman Joelle Castelli said.

The decisions about who is essential and who is not were made at the department level, Horne and Poirrier's email said. They're subject to change.

However, city workers have been divided into critical and non-critical roles, wrote the city's marketing and communications director Ashley Bauman in an email. Public safety, water, wastewater and other workers needed to keep the city running have been deemed critical. Other workers are being encouraged to work from home if possible, and city departments are using 'rotations' to keep the number of people working together low, Bauman wrote.

Workers whose regular duties aren't needed during the coronavirus pandemic are being transferred to the city's call center or to support other departments, Bauman said.

Tampa is acting according to the city's longstanding policy, which has been used whenever its emergency operations center activates. Usually, that's during hurricanes, Bauman said.

'It's important to note that not all emergencies are the same. The way we respond to a hurricane is different from how we are responding to an outbreak, and our employees understand that they need to be flexible,' Bauman wrote in an email.

St. Petersburg's coronavirus pay policy, which took effect April 1, also deems all employees essential. However, the policy orders 'non-emergency essential employees' to stay home. Supervisors can assign those employees other duties, according to the policy, which was written by Human Resources Director Chris Guella. And even if those workers work fewer than 40 hours in a particular week, they're guaranteed a full paycheck.

Critical St. Petersburg workers must report to work via telecommuting, if possible, or in person, if necessary. Those workers, plus any non-emergency essential workers who were asked to come in, will receive extra paid time off at a rate of 0.25 hours for every hour worked, up to 100 hours.

The policy applies to all roughly 3,500 city employees, including its more than 500 parttime workers. For part-time workers, managers are reviewing time sheets from the last six months to a year to determine an average number of hours worked per week. The part-time workers will be compensated for hours up to that average.

In Tampa, the area's largest city, which employs some 4,500 people, all city employees are considered essential. None will see pay reductions, Mayor Jane Castor has said.