

CALIFORNIA SECURITY CASE LAW LIBRARY

Meal and Rest Breaks for Security Guards in California

Updated 2026-08-04 · 8 min read · Cluster: labor · summitsecuritysacramento.com/case-law/meal-rest-breaks-security-guards-california

California security guards are generally entitled to a 30-minute unpaid meal period for shifts over 5 hours and paid 10-minute rest breaks every 4 hours, but a guard posted alone may sign a written on-duty meal agreement that is revocable at any time.

Why breaks are a recurring dispute for guards

Security officers are often the only staff on a post, which makes it operationally hard to step away for an uninterrupted, duty-free break.

California law does not carve out a blanket exception for security guards; instead it allows an on-duty meal period agreement in specific circumstances, most commonly when the nature of the work prevents relief.

Disputes usually arise when a guard is told to stay on post 'in case something happens' without a signed on-duty agreement or without being relieved of all duties during the break.

Break rules at a glance

Break type	When it applies	Pay treatment
Meal period	Shift over 5 hours (second meal period if over 10 hours)	Unpaid, duty-free, at least 30 minutes
On-duty meal agreement	Nature of work prevents relief, e.g. sole guard on post	Paid, must be written and revocable by employee
Rest break	Every 4 hours or major fraction worked	Paid, 10 minutes, counted as time worked
Missed break premium	Employer fails to provide a compliant break	One extra hour of pay per workday, per violation type

What to keep track of

- Whether you signed a written on-duty meal agreement, and whether you were told you could revoke it
- Text messages or radio logs showing you were told to stay on post through a break

- Timecards or clock records showing missed or short breaks
- Any premium pay ('break penalty') the employer did or did not pay

Practical notes for guards

An on-duty meal agreement is only lawful when the job genuinely prevents relief and the agreement is in writing and revocable at will by the guard.

If a relief officer is available but scheduling failures keep you on post anyway, that is a compliance gap worth documenting, not a lawful exception.

Research and education only

This page is provided for research and general education about California labor law as it may relate to security work. Summit Force Security Group is not a law firm and does not provide legal advice or legal representation.

For a question about your own pay or breaks, contact the California Labor Commissioner's Office or consult a licensed California employment attorney.

Quick answers

Can a security guard be required to work through a meal break?

Only under a valid written, revocable on-duty meal agreement where the nature of the work genuinely prevents relief; otherwise the guard is owed a duty-free 30-minute break.

Is an on-duty meal break paid or unpaid?

An on-duty meal period taken under a valid agreement must be paid, unlike a standard off-duty meal period.

What happens if a rest break is skipped?

The employer generally owes one additional hour of pay at the regular rate for each workday a compliant rest break was not provided.

Can a guard revoke an on-duty meal agreement?

Yes, a guard can revoke a written on-duty meal agreement at any time and then must be given a normal off-duty break.

Where can a guard report break violations?

A wage claim can be filed with the California Labor Commissioner's Office, which investigates meal and rest break violations.

Primary sources — read the official text

Labor Code Section 226.7	California Legislative Information	https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?sectionNum=226.7.&lawCode=LAB
--------------------------	------------------------------------	---

Labor Code Section 512	California Legislative Information	https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?sectionNum=512.&lawCode=LAB
IWC Wage Order 4-2001	California DIR	https://www.dir.ca.gov/iwc/wageorderindustries.htm
Meal Periods FAQ	California DLSE	https://www.dir.ca.gov/dlse/faq_mealperiods.htm
Rest Periods FAQ	California DLSE	https://www.dir.ca.gov/dlse/faq_restperiods.htm

Research and education only. Summit Force Security Group is a licensed private patrol operator (PPO #122730), not a law firm. Nothing in this digest is legal advice, no attorney-client relationship is created, and nothing here implies endorsement or approval by BSIS, the Department of Consumer Affairs, the Labor Commissioner, the Civil Rights Department, the State of California, OSHA, FEMA, or any court or agency. Statutes and case law change — verify the current text with the primary sources above and consult a licensed California attorney about your situation.

Need coverage instead of research? Summit Force Security Group · 1-800-823-5337 · Summitforces@gmail.com · summitsecuritysacramento.com