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On-Call, Standby and Travel Time Pay for Security Guards

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Time a security guard spends under an employer's control — including many on-call periods, required travel between posts during a shift, and sleep time on a covered overnight post — is often compensable under California law even if the guard is not actively patrolling.

The core test: employer control

California generally asks whether the employer controls the guard's activities during the time in question, not simply whether the guard is 'working' in an active sense.

Time spent waiting for a dispatch call, required to stay near a phone or vehicle, or restricted from personal errands, can count as hours worked even without an active task.

Common time categories

Time type	Typically compensable?	Key factor
Travel between posts during a shift	Yes	Ordered by employer during working hours
Commute from home to first post	Usually no	Normal commute rule applies
On-call time with tight response window	Often yes	Degree of restriction on personal time
Sleep time on 24-hour residential post	Depends on agreement	May allow limited sleep-time exclusion under specific conditions
Waiting for relief guard to arrive	Yes	Guard remains under employer's control

Signs that on-call time should be paid

- Very short required response times that prevent normal personal activities
- Requirement to remain in uniform or carry employer equipment while on-call
- Frequent actual call-outs that make the on-call period effectively part of the job

- Employer discipline for being unreachable during on-call windows

What to document

Keep records of dispatch calls, on-call schedules, and any written on-call or sleep-time agreements provided by the employer.

Research and education only

This content is for research and education about how California wage-and-hour concepts may apply to security work. Summit Force Security Group is not a law firm and does not provide legal advice or representation.

Guards with specific pay questions should contact the California Labor Commissioner's Office or a licensed California employment attorney.

Quick answers

Is travel between two security posts on the same shift paid?

Generally yes, because it occurs during working hours at the employer's direction.

Is a guard's commute from home to the first post paid?

Usually no, under the standard commute rule that applies to most employees.

Does being on-call always count as hours worked?

Not always; it depends on how restricted the guard's personal time is during the on-call period.

Can sleep time be excluded from pay on an overnight post?

Only in limited circumstances with a specific agreement and adequate sleeping facilities; it is not automatic.

What if I am paid a flat rate regardless of hours on-call?

A flat on-call stipend may not satisfy minimum wage or overtime requirements if actual compensable hours are higher; this is worth reviewing with the Labor Commissioner.

Primary sources — read the official text

IWC Wage Order 4-2001	California DIR	https://www.dir.ca.gov/iwc/wageorderindustries.htm
Hours Worked FAQ	California DLSE	https://www.dir.ca.gov/dlse/faq_hoursworked.htm
Labor Code Section 510	California Legislative Information	https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?sectionNum=510.&lawCode=LAB
Fact Sheet on Hours Worked	U.S. Department of Labor	https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/fact-sheets/22-flsa-hours-worked

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