

Village equipment policy under fire

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A Belgium resident has complained that a Department of Public Works employee uses a village truck to go home for lunch and breaks and also used a village skid loader to do work at his home on Friday, July 16.

In a July 17 letter to Village President Kevin Kowalkowski and Ozaukee Press, the unnamed resident said the employee, Pat Wester, and his supervisor, if he knew about it, should be suspended for a day without pay. They should also pay back the village for use of its equipment, the writer said.

Kowalkowski said Wednesday the village's ordinance prohibits such uses. He will discuss the matter at a staff meeting Friday, July 23.

"We either have to obey the ordinance and stop the practice or we have to change the ordinance," he said.

Public Works Director Dan Birenbaum said village officials long ago approved employees taking trucks home for lunch and breaks because they are often working in the area and it saves time.

"We've also been allowed to use village equipment in our off time," he said. "That's been part of the perks of our job."

Wester was surprised when he heard about the complaint, saying he used the skid loader for about 30 minutes to move two to three yards of dirt from behind his garage to the Belgium Fire Department.

The dirt will be used as fill for a paved path from a parking lot behind the firehouse to the bike path.

"So the village got free fill for the path. What people don't realize is we use our personal equipment if the village doesn't have the right tool or equipment," Wester said.

"When we put new sod in the park three years ago, we didn't want to use our heavy equipment on it. So we used my riding lawn mower all summer. I didn't charge them anything for that and I even put gas in it."

Wester said he worked from 6 to 10 a.m. last Friday because he worked two hours on Saturday. He was off duty when he borrowed the skid loader, he said.

During the summer, public works employees work 6:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Mondays through Thursdays and 6 a.m. to noon Fridays.

Most public works employees are also members of the Belgium Fire Department and other organizations that benefit the community, noted Birenbaum, who is fire chief.

Wester is an emergency medical technician who is active in the Belgium Community Club.