

BC WORK CAMP SURVIVAL GUIDE

Employee Resource



employee camp life



Developed by the **Metlakatla Development Corporation**



Welcome From Chief Harold Leighton, Metlakatla First Nation

The promise of work on large scale projects means great change for the people of Metlakatla and other First Nations. While we look forward to the economic opportunities, we also recognize this will mean great sacrifices by our community.

Many of these jobs require our people to live and work in camp settings. While the camp conditions have improved since the old fish and logging camps, it still means a lot of time away from family, community, and home.

To support our people, we created these materials to help build an understanding of what camp life is like. To be away from home for weeks on end, you and your family need to be prepared.

With input from First Nations people, workers, industry, and training providers, the BC Work Camp Survival Guide will give you and your family a look at camp life. Learn from experienced camp workers and their families on how to prepare for and live the camp lifestyle.

Opportunity Awaits

Welcome

These days, many work opportunities on large scale construction projects require you to live in a camp setting. The good news is, the camps are more like lodges, with good food, warm beds, and clean sheets. However, living and working in a camp is a big disruption for you and your family.

The BC Work Camp Survival Guide is a set of tools to help you learn more about what life is like inside a camp.

These tools can help you and your family if:

- you are thinking about a job on an industrial construction site, building a pipeline, working in a mine, or in the oil and gas industry;
- you are looking at employment as a carpenter, a janitor, a pipefitter, a cook, a heavy equipment operator, a driver, a labourer, or employment in another capacity or trade.
- These tools will show you what life is like for others, but they ask you to think about how life will be for you and your family.

Ultimately, the decision to work in a camp is yours, if you decide that is what you want to do, these tools will provide some good information and good questions to help you prepare for life in camp.

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A New Beginning

my STORY

“Camp is like any new place: you need a little time to fit in.”



When I first arrived in camp, I was nervous about the work and the lifestyle up there. Camp is like any new place, you need a little time to fit in. I could see how the more experienced workers made the camp a home away from home by eating meals together and socializing after work in the gym and rec room. They made plans to watch the hockey game on a Saturday night, just like you'd do back home.

I've been employed over a year now and I've learned how to make the job work for me. The money is definitely the biggest selling point, but there are perks to camp life too, especially if you take advantage of them. I use the gym almost every day, it's like a free gym membership. Getting fed three times a day by professional chefs isn't bad either. On a good day, life in camp feels like living in a hotel. It'll never be as good as home, but as far as a workplace goes, I've never been treated better.

— Male Labourer, 24



~
*Be sure to ask
your employer
about the various
amenities available
at your work site*
~

LODGING AND AMENITIES

Over the past twenty years, designing quality camp lodging and amenities has become a priority for employers. Employers recognize that leaving the comfort of your home is hard enough, so they believe creating a home-away-from-home is an important step to maintaining a healthy camp lifestyle. Remote work can feel isolating at times, so building relationships with your coworkers and taking advantage of the available amenities can help to create a community away from home.

Camp sites may include full service lounges and state-of-the-art facilities including fitness centers, recreation areas, and impressive kitchens and dining amenities. Many companies strive to create accommodations that offer the comforts of home including private or shared bathrooms, laundry services, and a comfortable bed. Some facilities include in-room digital service television and Wi-Fi, while others offer game rooms with satellite televisions. Although no two camps are alike, you can count on a place to rest, relax and unwind.



~
*Pack several days
before the date of
departure, in order to
avoid feeling rushed
and forgetting
the essentials.*

~

GETTING TO CAMP

Getting to and from camp is often arranged by your employer. You should expect to take a long journey, as many remote camps are difficult to get to. Work is typically conducted in remote or isolated locations outside of town and can involve up to 4 hours' driving time a day. Remember, even if a camp is located closer to your home you may be expected to live on camp during your work rotation.

Your journey may include airplanes, buses and even company cars to get you to the camp site. Some companies prefer to fly their workers in and out for a few days while other rotational schedules may expect you to relocate for a few weeks at a time. When your travel arrangements have been made, it is your responsibility to meet at the right spot and on time!



checklist

WHAT TO BRING:

- ▣ **Work & casual clothes and footwear.**
- ▣ **Gym wear.**
- ▣ **Toiletries.**
- ▣ **Entertainment such as games, books, laptops and movies .**
- ▣ **Communication devices.**
- ▣ **Medicine (with accompanying appropriate doctor's notes).**
- ▣ **DO NOT BRING alcohol, unprescribed drugs or weapons/firearms.**

PREPARE FOR CAMP

Preparing for a new job is challenging for any worker in any field but packing for remote work has the added challenge of isolation: once you arrive at camp, there's no popping home for a forgotten toothbrush! Preparedness begins with knowing the location of the camp, considering the weather/seasonality, and understanding what kind of facilities and amenities you can expect.

Experienced workers were unanimous in their advice that new workers bring a well-prepared kit of personal belongings. This includes proper work clothes and tools, as well as casual camp clothes and gym wear. Many workers stressed the importance of bringing their own entertainment such as books, laptops and entertainment while others swore by comforts like a pair of slippers, or their own pillow. Some camps may have banned items, such as alcohol, unprescribed drugs and firearms.



Work Family

my STORY

**“The job will
always be hard,
but it’s nice to
know I’m part
of a team.”**



I came into camp thinking it was Me against the World. I thought I’d only have time to work and talk to my family, and because of this I ignored a lot of the conversation and fun going on around me. It hadn’t occurred to me that my coworkers were going through the same thing I was, and that by banding together, they were making the best of it.

Now, my coworkers are my biggest allies in camp. The job will always be hard, but it’s nice to know I’m part of a team, that my team depends on me to get the work done and to support one another during the tough times. Making friends at camp is probably the best thing you can do to keep the work sustainable—it’s one of the main reasons I go back, shift after shift. You can’t bring your family to camp. You can make yourself part of the ‘work family’.

— Female Welder, 27



checklist

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT:

- ▣ Remote locations.
- ▣ 10-12 hour shifts.
- ▣ Work rotations such as 3-on & 1-off.
- ▣ All types of weather conditions.
- ▣ Labour intensive.
- ▣ Night shifts.
- ▣ Overtime.
- ▣ Seasonal disruptions.

WORKING CONDITIONS

Remote work camps come in all sizes! On a large camp site, you could be one of thousands working and living on the camp grounds while some camps may be as small as ten core employees.

As a camp worker you may be sent to a camp site for extended periods of time including working for three weeks and 'off' for one week. You can expect 10-12 hour labour intensive shifts that are often physically demanding, run in all types of weather conditions and run through the night.

You should also expect longer work shifts since there is consistent need for overtime hours. Some shifts may run 12-14 hours a day and, at times, you may be asked to stay longer than three weeks before you head home for a break. Seasonal weather conditions may also affect work rotations and schedules, so being flexible is a necessary attribute!



checklist

THE IDEAL WORKER:

- ▣ **Flexible.**
- ▣ **Takes initiative.**
- ▣ **Adaptable.**
- ▣ **Team player.**
- ▣ **Accountable.**
- ▣ **Punctual.**
- ▣ **Safety conscious.**
- ▣ **Good physical health**
- ▣ **Effective communicator**
- ▣ **Positive and professional attitude.**

WORKER CHARACTERISTICS

The remote work lifestyle is not for everyone. The isolation and labour intensive work rotations can seem as a deterrent for many workers. But for some it's an opportunity to explore new regions, earn a great living and build relationships with people from all parts of the world. Many seasoned workers found opportunities for advancement and job mobility as a great advantage of working in remote settings.

To excel in a remote workplace you have to be flexible and continue to adapt to the workplace. Many employers seek workers that take initiative and work well with others. Being a team player and demonstrating professionalism by being well prepared and on time for shifts are only a few key characteristics of the ideal remote worker.



WORKSAFE BC

WorkSafe BC is responsible for the inspection, prevention, information, training, compensation, and rehabilitation activities in the province. They offer countless resources for employees ranging from workplace culture to employee and employer duties and obligations.

To learn more visit www.worksafebc.com

RESPECTFUL WORKPLACE

Isolation and homesickness are a constant challenge for remote camp workers so building relationships is the most important first step to getting over the initial culture shock. When asked what workers valued most about remote work, ‘co-worker relationships’ was a steady second to ‘financial opportunity.’ Many long-term workers look forward to returning to work because of the extensive friend group they have developed in camp.

Creating a respectful workplace culture should be a priority for all workers. When it comes to bullying and harassment, workers, employers and supervisors have legal obligations. The Occupational Health & Safety policies provide guidance on how workplace parties can meet their obligations to prevent and address bullying and harassment in the workplace.

For the employee, employer and supervisor policies as outline by WCB and the BC Human Rights Code. Visit the [Resource Page](#)



Reaching Out

my STORY

“A lot of us
work remotely
so we can take care
of our families, but
it’s important to
remember to take
care of ourselves too.”



During my second year as a pipe fitter, my three-week shift got extended by ten days. I was already so tired from the long hours, and the extension meant I’d have to miss my daughter’s birthday. Even though I was exhausted I’d lie awake at night, unable to sleep. I was eating more dessert than dinner, and staying up in my room after work instead of going to the gym like I usually did. I felt trapped by the job, and I wanted a lay-off.

I pulled aside my supervisor to tell him what was going on and we were able to work out a compromise. It was a good lesson for me: I was able to recognize that the best way to curb my stress levels was to address them head on. I know that eating well, getting proper exercise, and making use of the HR support (like talking with a supervisor) are all good ways to stay happy at camp. A lot of us work remotely so we can take care of our families, but it’s important to remember to take care of ourselves too.

— Male Pipefitter, 40

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checklist

SELF CARE TIPS:

- ▣ Eat a balanced and healthy meal.
- ▣ Get plenty of rest.
- ▣ Maintain an exercise routine.
- ▣ Take time for yourself.
- ▣ Read, watch a movie or a sports game.
- ▣ Socialize with coworkers.
- ▣ Connect with family often.
- ▣ Write in a journal.
- ▣ Get some fresh air
- ▣ Stay hydrated.

MAINTAIN YOUR WELL BEING

For many workers, remote work means making personal sacrifices. You leave your families and friends for long stretches of time to work 10 to 12 hour days, so staying engaged and treating yourself well sets you up for success. Finding time to relax and unwind or keeping a consistent exercise routine can help to support your well being. Creating opportunities to socialize with coworkers or making calls to loved ones can help combat feelings of isolation. Those who have made a sustainable career out of the job stress the importance of self-care as a baseline requirement for the camp lifestyle.

The key to maintaining your well being is prevention. Don't wait until stress sets in before you take care of yourself. Getting plenty of rest and eating a well balanced diet can keep you energized for those long work shifts. Remember, if you don't take care of your needs, it's impossible to take care of your family's needs.



checklist

AVOID STRESS **Healthlink BC**

- ▣ **Talk to a someone you trust.**
- ▣ **Find a balance between personal, work and family needs.**
- ▣ **Try relaxation techniques.**
- ▣ **Avoid caffeine.**
- ▣ **Get more sleep.**
- ▣ **Go for a walk or exercise.**
- ▣ **Write in a journal.**

OVERCOME STRESS

We all experience some stress but too much stress or being under stress for too long is not good for you. You may feel pressure to do well at the job and maintain relationships back home but balancing these priorities may be a difficult task. Job stress comes in many different forms and affects your mind and body in different ways but constant stress can make you more likely to get sick more often (HealthLink 2016). You may get headaches or have trouble sleeping.

Be aware of the signs of stress. At work you might experience problems with concentration, job dissatisfaction, or even decreased motivation. Don't ignore these signs – as ignoring them may make them worse. If you start to experience any of these symptoms it is important you get the help you need. Talk to your loved ones or a supervisor you trust, to help create strategies to reduce stress at work.

Seek Counselling



COMMUNITY HEALTH REPRESENTATIVE - CHR

The purpose of a Community Health Representative (CHR) is to provide community health promotion services to members of a community.

Contact your local CHR to access the many support services available in your hometown.

ACCESS YOUR SUPPORTS

Having the right supports in your life can help you manage your stress. Family and friends or co-workers and supervisors can impact how you perceive and cope with stressful situations. Being far away from home and your loved ones can sometimes make it difficult to ask for help. But accessing the right supports is critical to maintaining the camp lifestyle.

Many employers and Unions provide free confidential counselling services. Whether you wish for support with mental health needs, combating addictions or guidance on adjusting to the camp lifestyle, the support is there for you. Connect with your employer to learn more about the services they offer and use them when you need them.



Family Matters

my STORY

“One of the hardest things about camp work is saying goodbye to my kids.”



One of the hardest things about camp work is saying goodbye to my kids. If they get upset, I sit down with them and we talk about the reasons why I have to go. I tell them that my job puts a roof over their heads and food on the table and pays for our clothes and hobbies. I frame it as a family project where everyone has a part to play, even them.

At camp, I'm able to call home to check in with them. We use Skype so we can see each other's faces, and even though we're so far away, it can still feel like we're in the same room. Toward the end of shift we start to plan things for my time back home. Movie night, swimming lessons, family visits, a birthday party, we make that week off feel like a mini-vacation. We get the kind of quality time I never had when I was working in town, five days a week, earning half the wage I now make.

— Male Cook, 31



~

*Maintaining
your family ties
is one of the most
important routines
in a camp worker's
daily life.*

~

MAINTAIN FAMILY TIES

The most obvious effect of remote work is that it requires the worker to be away from home for several weeks at a time. This results in a significant lifestyle transformation for everyone from the worker, spouses and children, and friends. Irregular communication, incompatible schedules and fatigue all become barriers to meaningful connection with families while away at camp.

Maintaining family ties is one of the most important routines in a worker's life. Speaking with family members through telephones, FaceTime or even Skypeing, helps in staying in touch and feeling connected with your home life. It may be helpful to set a regular schedule for making calls to home at a time that is convenient to both you and your family. Keep a calendar, marking important dates such as birthdays and anniversaries so you don't forget to call home on those days! Your family is your biggest supporter and because you are not physically available, maintaining that connection becomes very important.



checklist

SUPPORT FAMILY TIES

- ▣ **Create a communication routine together.**
- ▣ **Give family members a break when you are home.**
- ▣ **Arrange for 1-1 time with your spouse or partner.**
- ▣ **Plan activities with your children.**
- ▣ **Schedule time for missed events such as birthdays.**
- ▣ **Share in household chores when you are home.**
- ▣ **Support family routines despite the irregular lifestyle.**

SUPPORT FAMILY MEMBERS

The remote work lifestyle has a particularly large impact on family members left back at home. Housework and childcare duties can become intensified without the worker there to help and distance within a marriage or partnership can create an emotional strain. When you leave for camp, your family members are left with household chores that were once shared. Shoveling the driveway, cooking and cleaning, maintaining the house, all of these once shared duties become the responsibility of one person.

Remote work requires the 'home' partner to be more self-sufficient on all fronts, so remember to support and appreciate their efforts while you are away. Find ways to demonstrate your appreciation because without your family's support and someone to take care of your home, it would be difficult to stay focused at work.

Understanding



check it out!

A GREAT KIDS BOOK



MY DAD IS A FIFO DAD

STAY CONNECTED WITH KIDS

Leaving your children to work on camp may be the hardest part of the job and a recurring event that never seems to get easier. Remote work affects kids too and preparing them for these changes can present a delicate challenge. It is important to give your children all the information before you leave for camp. Answer their questions and explain the benefits of the job such as financial security which allows for vacations, a new house, or even presents!

Children may want to know about your worksite so take the time to explain details like what you will do, where you will sleep, and who you will be with. Create a communication schedule with your kids and when you come home, plan activities you can do together. Remember, it may take your kids a little longer to adjust to your absence than you anticipate, so be patient and understanding.



Money Matters\$

my STORY

“If the money is the big draw, you owe it to yourself to be responsible with your spending and savings.”



Money is the biggest draw of this job, no question. But you're kidding yourself if you think you're going to get rich right away. A lot of new workers I see come in thinking the money is better than it is—they want to buy the truck and the flat screen and the trip to Mexico, all with their first paycheque!

You can have all those things, but not all at once. I learned this the hard way. Six months into my first job I'd got myself into debt. I was spending my paycheque on trivial things because I knew another one was coming in a month's time. The truth is, if the money is the big draw, you owe it to yourself to be responsible with your spending and savings. This means working out a financial plan, sticking to a budget and making sure the bills get paid before buying the new flat screen.

— Male Heavy Equipment Operator, 46



Speak with a financial planner to establish a financial strategy that works for your family

BE FINANCIALLY AWARE

~ High wages and secure employment is by far the largest advantage to remote work. Many workers found that taking on remote jobs allowed them to save money for houses, vehicles, vacations and their children's education.

Workers and family members need to collectively establish plans for financial goals, budgeting and access to funds. Both the worker and the worker's partner need to agree on a set financial strategy, and spend within the agreed upon limits. New workers can make arrangements for automatic transactions that move a set amount of their pay cheque into a savings account, and limits the amount of money that could be spent in the interim. While it is a commonly held misconception that remote work leads to extreme wealth, setting and achieving financial goals give families a sense of purpose and reward, balancing the hard work and sacrifice of the lifestyle.



checklist

BEFORE YOU LEAVE:

- ▣ **Develop a strategy for bill payments.**
- ▣ **Set up internet banking.**
- ▣ **Address any pressing homecare issues.**
- ▣ **Schedule homecare into your time off.**
- ▣ **Make arrangements with a spouse, friend, family member for dealing with unforeseen homecare issues.**
(make a list of ph. # for various trades and repair services).

PREPARE FOR TRANSITIONS

For any worker with a family, the first step to preparing for remote work is to discuss it as a family. The best way to ensure a healthy camp/life balance is to involve the whole family in both the decision to go to camp and in decisions around how time off is spent.

Preparing family members for the transition requires communication and compromise on all sides.

Although the camp lifestyle comes with its challenges, the opportunities to be successful are easily achieved with a great transition plan. Connect with seasoned workers and learn from their experiences, talk to companies and supervisors and meet with families who live a camp lifestyle. The more you know about what to expect, the better prepared you and your family will be.



Opportunity Awaits

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RESOURCES

Watch the Employee Workcamp Video Here

workcampsurvivalguide.ca/videos-employee

For additional resources visit

workcampsurvivalguide.ca

- [1. WorkSafe BC](#)
- [2. BC Human Rights Code](#)
- [3. Worker duties, as set out in WCB policy D3-116-1](#)
- [4. Employer duties, as set out in policy D3-115-2](#)
- [5. Supervisor duties, as set out in WCB policy D3-117-2](#)

Developed In Partnership



Metlakatla First Nation



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Strengthening Communities, one Person at a time.

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