

UNION FACT SHEET 12

Screen Breaks: Operations Centres

Queensland Ambulance Service Employees

What the Change Means

Emergency Medical Dispatchers (EMDs) undertake sustained, high-intensity work managing emergency calls and dispatch functions across multiple screens.

The *QAS Certified Agreement 2025* and *SOP03.24 – OpCen Operations: Rest Pause and Scheduled Meal Breaks* confirm that screen breaks (rest pauses) and meal breaks are mandatory — not discretionary — and form part of QAS’s fatigue and welfare management framework.

Screen breaks are in addition to meal breaks and must be scheduled and maintained by each Operations Centre.

What the Law Says

Under the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (Qld), sections 17–19, QAS must eliminate or minimise health and safety risks, including fatigue, psychosocial strain, and visual stress from extended screen exposure.

The Industrial Relations Act 2016 (Qld) and the *QAS Certified Agreement 2025* require that:

- All authorised working time is paid; and
- Rest pauses and meal breaks must be structured into the roster and not removed due to workload.

SOP03.24 explicitly mandates that all OpCen personnel are entitled to both rest pauses and scheduled meal breaks during their rostered shift

How It Works

Shift Duration	Rest Pauses (15 min each)	Meal Breaks (30 min each)
8 to <9 hours	2	1
9 to ≤10 hours	3	1
>10 hours	3	2

Applies to:

All OpCen staff (EMDs, OCSs, SOSs) performing call-taking, dispatch, or supervisory duties.

Break Management:

- Breaks must be scheduled at the start of each shift, visible in the OpCen Meal Planner, or confirmed with the Operations Centre Supervisor (OCS).

- At the start of a break, staff must notify the OCS of the break type and commencement time.
- On returning, staff must advise the OCS and update Genesys status accordingly.
- Console handovers should occur where necessary to facilitate breaks (see SOP03.20).

The OCS is responsible for ensuring that all scheduled breaks occur while maintaining operational readiness.

Any inability to provide a break must be reported to the Operations Centre Manager (OCM) and, where required, the Statewide OpCen SOS.

If Breaks Are Missed

If operational demands prevent a rest pause or meal break:

- Notify your OCS immediately.
- Record the missed break in the SHE or equivalent system.
- Repeated failures must be escalated via WHS and industrial pathways.

QAS cannot lawfully expect continuous work without scheduled rest periods.

Why It Matters

Structured rest and meal breaks are a cornerstone of fatigue management — they:

- Reduce error risk,
- Support psychological recovery,
- Improve decision-making, and
- Protect against burnout and eye strain.

Fatigue in the OpCen environment is a safety hazard, not a personal weakness.

Union Tip

Screen breaks and meal breaks are non-negotiable safety and industrial entitlements.

If your Operations Centre routinely fails to deliver these breaks, log every missed instance and contact your delegate or HSR.

Raise persistent breaches to the Regional Consultative Committee (RCC).

Each OpCen is responsible for maintaining both rest pauses and meal breaks.

If you can't step away — it's a breach of safety, not your resilience.

MYTH-BUSTER: EMD SCREEN BREAKS

Myth 1: "Screen breaks are optional — take them only if it's quiet."

Fact:

Screen breaks are mandatory fatigue-control measures under *SOP03.24* and the *QAS Certified Agreement 2025*.

They are in addition to meal breaks, not a substitute.

Myth 2: “You only get one screen break a shift.”**Fact:****Wrong. Depending on shift length, you’re entitled to:**

- 2 × 15 min screen breaks on 8-hour shifts, + 1 meal break
- 3 × 15 min screen breaks on 9–10-hour shifts, + 1 meal break and
- 3 × 15 min screen breaks + 2 meal breaks on shifts over 10 hours.

These are scheduled and maintained by your Operations Centre.**Myth 3: “If I miss a screen break, I get paid for it.”****Fact:****No. Missed screen breaks are not compensated.****If you miss one, it must be rescheduled as soon as safe, recorded, and escalated if repeatedly missed.****(Only missed meal breaks may attract a payment.)****Myth 4: “It’s my responsibility to find time for breaks.”****Fact:****Each Operations Centre is responsible for ensuring both screen breaks and meal breaks occur. Supervisors must plan coverage and coordinate handovers so staff can actually take them.****Myth 5: “A meal break counts as one of my screen breaks.”****Fact:****Incorrect. Screen breaks are in addition to meal breaks.****Rest pauses and meal breaks are two separate entitlements under *SOP03.24* and must both be scheduled and maintained each shift.****Union Message****Screen breaks are mandatory, separate from meal breaks, and a core fatigue control.****If you can’t take them, log it and escalate it — fatigue is a risk, not a requirement.**