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THE BRITISH DRIVER'S HANDBOOK

Know Your Worth

The UK HGV driver's handbook to pay, hours, rights and running your own truck — without the spin.

CHAPTER 3

The Unpaid Day: Waiting Time and Where Your Hours Go

Ask any driver what wrecks a shift and waiting time will be near the top of the list. You arrive for your booked slot, and you sit. An hour. Two. Four. The goods aren't ready, the bays are full, the paperwork is wrong, or the gatehouse simply doesn't know you're there. Your driving hours are fine, but your working day is disappearing — and very often, so is your pay for it.

Anatomy of a long day

Picture a Monday at an RDC. The times below are an illustration, but most drivers will recognise the shape.

Time	What happens	Working for the job?
05:30	Arrive at the yard, walkround check, find the trailer, couple up	Yes — but sometimes done before the “official” start
06:00	Depart for the RDC	Yes
08:00	Arrive for an 08:00 slot. Told to wait in the queue	Yes
08:00–11:15	Edge forward in the queue, called to the gatehouse twice, then to a bay	Yes — this is the time that most often goes unpaid
11:15–12:30	Tipped, paperwork signed, released	Yes
12:30–16:00	Break, then drive to a collection and back to the yard	Yes, apart from the break
16:00–16:30	Drop trailer, fuel up, hand in paperwork	Yes

That is an eleven-hour day with well under six hours of driving. If you are on a day rate, the three hours in the queue cost the firm nothing and cost you three hours of your life. If you are paid hourly but “paid hours” somehow stop at eight or nine, the same thing happens by another route.

Who pays for the wait?

In a healthy arrangement, the contract between haulier and customer allows a period of **free time** for loading or unloading — say, two hours as an illustration. After that, the customer pays **demurrage**: a charge for keeping the truck and driver standing. The haulier can then afford to pay the driver for the extra time.

In a squeezed arrangement, none of that happens. The customer won’t pay for waiting, the haulier doesn’t push for it because it is afraid of losing the account, and the cost lands on the only person left: you. Either the hours go unpaid, or they vanish inside a flat day rate.

There is a third arrangement that is more common than it should be: the contract does allow demurrage, but the haulier never claims it because nobody has the evidence. A traffic office cannot bill a customer for three hours at a gate that nobody wrote down. That is where your own record becomes valuable to both of you.

What the rules say about waiting

This is a short overview. Chapters 4 and 5 go into the detail.

Minimum wage

If you are an employed worker, waiting time does not simply disappear in law. GOV.UK guidance on the National Minimum Wage says that time spent waiting to collect goods or to start a job counts as working time for minimum-wage purposes. That is a floor, not your contract rate. But it means that when all your hours are counted — including the

waiting — your average pay must not fall below the minimum wage for your age. On a long week with a lot of unpaid waiting, it is worth checking.

Working time

Under the Road Transport (Working Time) Regulations, sitting in a queue edging forward, being called to the gatehouse and moving to a bay is work. It is not a break, and it is not a **period of availability** (POA). A POA is time when you are not required to be at your workstation but must be available to start work, and you must know about it in advance, along with how long it is likely to last. Being told on arrival “you’ll be tipped in about three hours, go and get some rest”, and genuinely being free to do so, can be POA. Creeping forward in a queue for three hours cannot.

RECORD IT AS IT REALLY WAS

You may be asked to put queue time down as a break or as POA to keep a day inside the limits. Don’t. Your tachograph and your records are your responsibility, and a break has to be a genuine break. Recording work as rest is a false record, and it is the driver who faces the roadside check. If a day cannot be done legally because of waiting, that is the firm’s planning problem, not something to be fixed with the mode switch.

Where else your hours go

Gate waiting gets all the attention, but it is not the only unpaid time. Many drivers find that small chunks elsewhere add up to more than the big waits. Look out for:

- **Pre-start checks** done before the paid shift begins because “that’s how it’s always been”.
- **Finding and coupling a trailer** in a crowded yard, or waiting for one to be loaded.

- **Travel to a changeover point** or to pick up a truck parked somewhere else.
- **Fuelling, washing, and paperwork** at the end of the shift, after the “finish” time.
- **Defects** — waiting for a fitter or for a replacement unit.
- **Re-deliveries and refusals**, where you wait, get turned away and come back.
- **Unpaid breaks you could not really take**, because you were on call or moving the truck.

Keep your own record

Whether you are employed, agency or self-employed, your best protection is your own log. The tachograph records what the vehicle and card did. Your notes record why. The two together are hard to argue with.

- 1 **Pick one method and stick to it.** A pocket notebook, a notes app or a photo of the gatehouse clock — whatever you will actually use every day.
- 2 **Log the key times at each site:** booked slot, arrival, when you were called in, when you went on a bay, when you were released.
- 3 **Add references:** booking reference, delivery number, and the name of whoever booked you in or told you how long you would be.
- 4 **Note how you recorded it on the tachograph:** other work, POA or break, and why.
- 5 **Take a photo** if the wait is unusual — a full queue, a closed bay, a sign saying the site is behind.
- 6 **Compare with your payslip** every week. Mismatches are much easier to query within days than months.

A single line is enough. For example: “*Mon, RDC slot 08:00, arr 07:52, called 10:40, on bay 11:15, released 12:30. Booking ref 4471. Queue, other work.*”

- ☐ Booked slot time and actual arrival time
- ☐ Time called in, time on bay, time released
- ☐ Booking and delivery references, and names
- ☐ Tacho mode used for each part of the wait
- ☐ Photos when the wait is out of the ordinary
- ☐ Weekly check of your log against your payslip

YOUR LOG HELPS THE FIRM TOO

A haulier can only charge a customer for waiting it can prove. If your firm has demurrage in its contracts, a week of written times from you is money it can bill. Framing it that way — “this might help you charge them” — often gets a better reception than a complaint.

Raising it with the traffic office

Once you have two or three weeks of records, you can raise the problem calmly and with facts. Something like this works better than a row at the end of a long shift:

“I’ve been writing down my times at the RDC. Over the last three weeks I’ve averaged about three hours from arrival to release, against a booked slot. Here are the times and references. Can you tell me whether we charge the customer for waiting, and how that time should be showing on my pay?”

Then listen to the answer. A firm that bills its customers properly will want your evidence. A firm that says “we can’t charge them, it’s just part of the job” is telling you something honest about how it values your time — and that is useful to know when you decide what to do next.

If you are agency, raise it with the agency as well as the site. Your pay comes from the agency, and it is the agency’s job to make sure your hours are recorded and paid correctly. If you are self-employed or running your own truck, the same records become the basis of a waiting-time charge on your invoice — Chapters 18 and 19 cover how to build that into your terms.

Spotting the sites that drain you

Drivers talk, and some sites are well known for long waits, poor facilities and rude gatehouses. Your log will show you which ones cost you the most. If your work keeps sending you to the same few problem sites, it is fair to ask whether the planning can change — an earlier slot, a different run, or at least paid time when the wait is out of your hands.

Site type	Typical pattern (illustration)	What to ask
Busy RDC with a booking system	Long queues when earlier slots overrun	Is demurrage charged after free time?
Manufacturer’s own dock	Waiting for goods to be ready	Can the collection be booked for when goods are actually ready?
Port or container terminal	Delays outside anyone’s control	How is this time paid and recorded?
Building site	No slot, no bay, waiting for a crane or forklift	Who confirms the site is ready before you set off?

Common mistakes

- **Relying on memory.** “We always wait ages there” is a feeling. Written times are evidence.
- **Recording queue time as a break** to stretch the day. It is a false record, and the risk sits with you.

- **Treating POA as a catch-all.** It only applies when you know about the wait in advance and roughly how long it will last.
- **Checking payslips once a quarter.** By then the details are gone. Check weekly.
- **Only counting gate time.** The unpaid ten minutes at each end of the shift can add up to more than the big waits.
- **Raising it angrily at the end of a bad day.** The same point made calmly the next morning, with times on paper, gets a far better hearing.

TRY THIS ON YOUR NEXT SHIFT

At every site you visit, write down four times: booked slot, arrival, on bay, released. That's it. At the end of the week, add up the minutes between arrival and on-bay. That total is the first number in your pay audit — and **The 7-Day Pay Audit** shows you what to do with it.

The Road Rule: a wait is still work. If it isn't written down, the only person paying for it is you.
