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What if Emailing During Your Commute Counted as Work?

The suggestion – sure to raise the hackles of employers everywhere – was made by university researchers in England who studied the commuting habits of thousands of people who travel by rail.

5 It's no secret that the expansion of Wi-Fi on trains, planes and automobiles has led to the de facto expansion of the working day, tying employees to their electronic devices as they send and receive countless work emails after clocking out from their jobs.

The researchers at the University of the West of England found that more than half of those studied read their work email and pored over work documents as they traveled.

10 "As an academic, nobody bothers where I do my work as long as it's done," Juliet Jain, senior research fellow at the Center for Transport Society of the university in Bristol, said in a phone interview. She noted that with increasing workloads, most people in the study "didn't see it as official work time, but something to make their lives easier."

15 Work-life balance has been a buzzy catchphrase of the modern era, in which employers provide such perks as office massages to pound away the stresses of their employees. But amid the emphasis on wellness programs come alarming tales like that of a 31-year-old Japanese worker who clocked in more than 159 hours of overtime in one month and worked herself to death.

20 In Japan, napping* in the office is common and a sign of diligence, but officials there and in other countries have moved to crack down on overworking. Last year, France, which already has a 35-hour workweek, introduced a law requiring large companies to give their employees the right to disconnect and block email outside work hours.

"The right to disconnect is reminding everyone that we ought to have a reasonable attitude to new technologies," Ms. Sabbe-Ferri said. "Having permanent access doesn't mean that we should be working all the time."

25 For now, the French regulation on the right to disconnect exists only in theory, she said, until the courts interpret it.

By Palko Karasz, adapted from *The New York Times*, August 30th, 2018

* napping = sleeping