

# The Province

## Elizabeth Rains: Employers, it's time to do your bit not to make the sun redder

*Opinion: The red sun is rising because of fires largely caused by climate change. One quick way to help quell future flames is to*

**Elizabeth Rains**

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Smoke particles from wildfires burning in the area enhances the colour of the sunset near Logan Lake, B.C., on Thursday, July 15, 2021. PHOTO BY DARRYL DYCK /THE CANADIAN PRESS

As the red sun rises over Vancouver, I wonder why too many organizations are preparing to send their staff back to full in-office jobs in September. That would make the sun redder.

I've worked for decades in post-secondary education as an instructor and an administrator. By and large, institutes of higher learning in Greater Vancouver are mandating full in-office work weeks for administrative staff in September.

Employees go back to their pre-COVID schedules the day after Labour Day, which coincides with the beginning of classes.

That's fine and good for students and for faculty like me. We're rarely scheduled for a five-day week. Two to four days are typical, and online learning is an option. But the office staff who worked in full five-day jobs before the pandemic should not be told to resume that routine.

The red sun is rising because of fires largely caused by climate change. One quick way to help quell future flames is to reduce people's commute. Shaving one day off a five-day week reduces

Sure, the big contributors to the climate mess are petroleum companies, air flights and the like. But even a drop in the bucket of carbon amelioration may be many drops of water on the fires.

Let's stop this reversion to the old status quo and the false belief that being at the job site enhances productivity. In reality it increases inefficiency by spurring too many money-wasting make-work projects. If the boss sees me "working" I'll score cookie points, the staffer thinks.

A reduced on-site work week could be expanded beyond education to other government jobs and the private sector as well. In addition to reducing the carbon from commutes, on-site work days could be staggered among staff, reducing traffic tie-ups.

A shift to permanent full or partial at-home work should not cause a dip in wages, as Google has proposed. The mega-corporation, which could well afford otherwise, is claiming that home-based employees deserve less pay than the on-site crew. That's backward thinking and a reason for climate-conscious computer users to switch to another browser. These employees should be paid more, not less, for doing their bit for humanity — and reducing Google's costs in maintaining office space.

There are a few weeks left to rethink back-to-work edicts. A change in the education sector to a shorter on-site work week would be a start, and it would show leadership to companies like Google. Employers, it's time to clear the air and do your bit to make the red sun white again.

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