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Severe Weather and Christmas Parties

As we are now firmly in autumn we thought it would be timely to discuss disruptive weather and to have or not to have a Christmas party.

Severe Weather

Floods, heavy rain, ice and snow: it is inevitable that every winter the Country will be suffering from at least one of these four extreme forms of weather. With plenty of employees commuting to work in their own vehicles, or relying on public transport, and not being within walking distance of work, this can cause a problem. Over the last few years we have seen heavy snow falls and awful floods render some people completely unable to leave their home, so what if these were your employees? What happens if people cannot make it into work? What are you, as the employer, expected to do in these situations?

An employer is responsible for the Health and Safety of their employees. Because of this, it would not be appropriate to ignore the severity of the weather and pressure employees to come into work if they wish to follow severe weather warnings and do not believe themselves able to. A realistic approach is needed when it comes to severe weather, it does not make sense for an employee to spend over half the day attempting to get to work when it is possible for them to work from the safety of their own home. On the other hand, a company will find it very difficult to operate if a large number of its employees are unable to attend work, and this is why a policy

expressing the company's expectations is good practice.

By implementing a Severe Weather Policy, you are providing your employees with a set of rules, expectations, and guidelines. It is important that you maintain a fair approach within your policy; if you come across as too forceful, it may damage the employer-employee relationship. No one wants to feel like they are working for an unreasonable employer who would expect them to drive to work through a snowstorm, thereby risking their own health and safety. Likewise, those employees who can make it in to work easily want to see that their efforts are rewarded, especially because they are going to be the employees picking up the slack.

Christmas Parties

Holding a Christmas party is a great way to boost the morale of employees and make them feel part of a team. It enables employees to blow off some steam together, and it satisfies an element of their reward package with social activities being a way for employers to show their appreciation for all the hard work completed throughout the year. Unfortunately, Christmas is a time of year in which people may consume a large amount of alcohol and may therefore do or say things they may come to regret later. If employees fall out with each other at a party it may then affect their working relationships, which may then lead to grievances being raised or claims of bullying and harassment. Without taking appropriate steps, you as the employer, may be vicarious liable, for any bullying, harassment or discrimination which takes place at a work-related social event.

One of the best ways to avoid these dangers is to make sure you have the right policies in place. An "Office Party" policy would detail what is and is not appropriate. It would remind employees that whilst they are at a social event, it is also a work event, and they should behave as such. If you combine this with a high level of communication outlining the company's expectations you will hopefully have a problem free party.

Ensure that the party meets everyone's needs. By providing vegetarian options and alcohol free drinks, everyone should feel welcome and able to enjoy the party. Make sure the party is held somewhere neutral i.e. a venue that welcomes people of all religions and sexualities as this will enable people to feel secure and respected. The most important recommendation, however, is that you deal with any aftermath of the party appropriately. If you are unfortunate enough to encounter an employee issue, as a result of the party, make sure you deal with this in a timely manner. Too often employees feel that complaints regarding an office party are not taken seriously, but you have a legal responsibility and a duty of care towards your employees to deal with any resulting complaints of bullying, harassment, discrimination or grievances as you would under any other circumstance.

How Can We Help?

If you have any queries relating to any of the subjects raised within this newsletter then please don't hesitate to contact us at hradvice@hasslefreehr.co.uk

For clarification of any of the above updates or for advice and guidance on any HR and/or Health and Safety Concerns contact us by emailing hradvice@hasslefreehr.co.uk or by calling 02476 664092.

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