



Do you employ staff?

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The Implications of Severe Weather for Employers

As we approach January severe weather and its effect on employees' ability to travel to work and their attendance is increasingly likely. The winter of 2010/2011 saw some severe snow fall which resulted in many public services grinding to a halt. Many meteorological observers predict something similar will occur again this year.

What measures are you putting in place to ensure your employees are treated consistently and fairly and any loss to your business is minimised?

Health and Safety

Health and safety is a big concern to employers unsurprisingly as you have a duty of care to your employees under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and are responsible for making sure your staff work safely during severe weather.

Do any of your employees work outside as part of their job?

If this is the case they might be unable to perform their duties if weather conditions are particularly poor. Their health may also be at greater risk if they work in the open air. If this applies to your business what controls and measures do you have in place to minimise hazards and risks in order to comply with health and safety legislation?

Absence or Lateness

One of the most common effects of the weather on employees is their ability to get into work. If an employee either does not turn up for work or is late because of disruptions to public transport or poor driving conditions how do you plan to manage them?

On the face of it an employer is entitled to treat the absence in the same way as any other unauthorised absence. Having said this, in the case of severe weather effecting roads and transport, both of which are factors out of their control, you may wish to be more lenient if you are satisfied that they made all reasonable efforts to get to work.

Is there another way to work?

If some employees can't make it onto work premises are you able to consider alternative ways of working? While this won't suit all roles could some employees work from home by logging onto their own PCs or laptops? If this is an option would they be able to access your internal systems remotely?

If working from home isn't an option you may want to consider offering additional hours to those that can make it to work or offer flexible working hours to those that may need to leave early. You may require some employees to carry out duties not normally associated with their job role. Do your policies cover what is expected of employees in these circumstances?

Do you have employees with young families?

Schools and nurseries may be shut due to severe weather which may effect employees who in fact could make it to work but do not have any alternative child care arrangements.

Such circumstances will almost certainly fall within the dependant leave section of the Employment Rights Act 1996. Time off in these circumstances is usually unpaid and short term. If the closure looks to be more long term, you might reasonably expect the employee to make alternative arrangements within that time so they can return to work.

What should you do about the prospect of severe weather?

The best thing you can do is review any existing policy relating to severe weather or make sure you draw up a policy if you don't have one. By having a clear policy in place there is less scope for confusion and employees will know what is required of them.

Ultimately it's not possible to be too prescriptive about what you should be doing. The chances are you will need to be flexible and use common sense to deal with any issues arising.

If you need help reviewing or drawing up a severe weather policy Hassle Free HR can help. Please email cmcdonald@hasslefreehr.co.uk for further information.

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 cmcdonald@hasslefreehr.co.uk or by calling 02476 664092 or 670381.



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