



Do you employ staff?

Do you have difficulty understanding your legal and contractual responsibilities as an employer?

Do employment problems keep you awake at night?

Hassle Free HR - Taking the hassle out of your HR and H&S Management

- [Visit our website](#)

Severe Weather and Christmas Parties

Winter has been somewhat slow to arrive this year, but with the recent cold snap and reports of snow we can now say that it is definitely here! Because of this, we thought it would be timely to once again discuss how disruptive weather can have an impact on employee safety, and to also provide you with some useful advice on managing your 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, due to 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, and despite the mild start to this years' winter, there are predictions that this winter will be one filled with severe weather. What happens if your employees 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 don't feel it's safe to do so. A realistic and flexible approach is needed when it comes to severe weather, it doesn't make sense for an employee to spend over half the day attempting to get to work when it may be possible for them to work safely in their own home. On the other hand, a Company will find it very difficult to operate if a large number of employees are unable to attend work, and this is why a policy expressing the Company's expectations and standards 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; 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 vicariously 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 therefore they should behave accordingly. If you combine this with a high level of communication outlining the Company's expectations and standards, 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 do not 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.

Hassle Free HR Limited Registration Number: 5844301