



Beginners Guide to Winter Weather and Business Disruption

Dealing with severe winter weather or indeed any unusual business disruption can be difficult and troublesome. So here are a few interesting and hopefully useful points to help you deal with the potential or actual disruptions!

The points are grouped under the headings of employment law, business continuity and health and safety.

EMPLOYMENT LAW

HR and employment regulation can be very troublesome – getting it wrong gives you a double whammy, it upsets your staff and costs you money.

1 If you decide to send employees home then you have to pay them for the hours if they go early. If it is your decision then normally you still have to pay the employees for the full day. Similarly for full days of closure, employees will be entitled to full pay unless there is provision in the contract of employment allowing for unpaid days or unpaid lay off.



2 Does this have an impact on future revisions to your contracts of employment?

3 You can make employees take time off as holiday, at times when it suits the business but only if you give advance notification. As the employer you must give notice that is equal to twice the length of time that the employer wants to be taken off e.g. 2 days' notice must be given for 1 day's holiday. Which leads to a problem as weather forecasting isn't an exact science! In other words you can't rely on this for a short notice holiday because you want to shut the office early or for a snow day. However, if the employee agrees to the employer's suggestion to take short or no notice holiday, this is fine.

4 If your employees try, but still didn't make it into work then you don't have to pay them. You have no obligation to pay if they fail to turn up for work, or for the hours missed if they are late. However, you may like to allow your employees to make up the time on other days or allow them

to take the time off as holidays.

5 There is no statutory right for employees who have children to have paid leave to look after their children if they are off school due to a 'snow day'. But they might have a contractual right to this. However, you may like to allow your employees to make up the time on other days or allow them to take the



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time off as holidays. Alternatively, if the shut down of the school is the only reason for absence and otherwise the employee would have been able to get to work, the employee would be entitled to unpaid time off for dependants to look after the children.

6 If you don't already, have a weather disruption policy as part of your employee handbook.

BUSINESS CONTINUITY

Business continuity is a fancy term for keeping your business running despite the worst the world does to you. Put that way it seems like a good idea, doesn't it! So have you planned for what might happen? Do you have a business continuity plan – and how does it cope with business disruptions.

1 Most businesses rely on email or telephone for customers and suppliers to get in contact and conduct business. If your staff can't get into work to deal with the phones, because either of snow or because the building has burnt down, what happens?

2 How can you re-direct your phones to another number, maybe to someone's home or mobile?

3 Can your staff pick up emails remotely? If not try a software like 'logmein' or for more sophisticated computer systems a private network or VPN, or maybe look at the various online collaboration tools.

4 Can you and your staff work remotely? Or can you only provide a answerphone type service.

5 What if the computers at work have a problem? Fire, flood, theft, power failure, etc., – how will you get access to your emails or work then?

HEALTH & SAFETY

The crux of Health and safety regulation is about looking after your staff and customers and protecting them from risks that you have the power to control, influence or amend. Winter weather is obviously completely out of your control. But you do have the power to influence what action you and your staff take:

1 Think about what risks are involved and write a risk assessment for you, your staff and your business.

2 Instruct your staff not to travel on company business if the weather conditions make travel dangerous.

3 If they do travel, making sure that they take appropriate safety measures and are issued with appropriate safety clothing – or indeed emergency food, snow chains, shovels or whatever.

4 If your staff make it into work, can they safely return home? Should you have a process for reviewing when to shut the workplace and send people home.

5 What happens if your workplace loses heating? Do you have an alternative heating method or at what point do you shut the workplace?

6 Do you need to have salt or grit for doorsteps, outside stairs or

slopes? And who is going to put it out?

7 Do you need to have external lighting?

CAVEAT

This beginners guide is just a guide and is no substitute for proper advice.

NEXT STEPS

You might need to carry out risk assessments, prepare disruption or continuity plans or tweak your computer system. If you need help with this then let us know as we have consultants who can help you to setup or install these systems, softwares or processes.

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