

Supporting Your Employees through Recovery from Natural Disasters

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The steps an employer takes to support employees following a disaster can be positive for both the employer and the employee.

The employer benefits by getting the business up and running as soon as possible. In addition to preserving the business, it is important to the future of the employees in that their jobs can be maintained. Employers who care about the welfare of their employees are making a strong statement to their workforce which in turn helps foster a sense of loyalty and strong morale.

Employees benefit by being able to return to work as soon as possible, thus preserving their ability to earn a living at a time when their personal resources may have been severely depleted. Knowing their employer is looking out for their welfare can help encourage motivate and uplift a worker who may be struggling in the aftermath of a disaster.

Things an employer can do:

- 1) Reach out to each employee to determine the status of the employee and his/her family.
 - Are they directly impacted by the disaster?
 - Are they safe?
 - Do they have housing and food?
 - Do they have family resources to help them in their recovery?
 - Are they injured or have other health concerns?
 - Do they have transportation?
 - Are they available to work?
 - Do they have communication capabilities (cellphone, computer access)?
 - How are family members coping?
- 2) If employee does not have housing, are there ways your company can help?
 - Does the company have any connections to housing resources that may be helpful?
 - Is the company able to help arrange temporary housing?
 - Are any co-workers able to provide temporary housing?
 - Can the company direct employee to housing resources?
- 3) If an employee does not have transportation:
 - Can the company arrange carpools?
 - Is there a company vehicle the employee can use?
 - Is there public transportation the company can help the employee obtain with company emergency funds?
 - Can the company rent a van to pick up/drop off employees?

- 4) Payroll Concerns:
 - Will employees be paid while business is shut down (a very expensive proposition, but a very strong statement of the importance of the employees to the company)?
 - Is an employee able to receive paychecks?
 - If employee is not receiving paychecks, can paychecks be sent in an alternative method such as direct deposit, check delivered by courier or hand delivered by another employee?
 - Can cash advances be provided to employees with a verified need?
 - Can the company help employees get unemployment benefits if necessary?
 - If a layoff is necessary, can health insurance be continued or can the company help with COBRA benefits?
 - Are any other company benefits that may be utilized?
 - *NOTE: Be certain any extra financial support to employees fits within existing corporate guidelines, or "emergency corporate policies" are created with the appropriate approval.*
- 5) Where to work:
 - If an employee cannot get to work, can they work from home?
 - Can a laptop or tablet be provided to an employee so they can work from home, or temporary housing
- 6) Some employees may need to work flexible hours so they can meet with insurance adjustors, contractors, medical appointments, etc.
 - Try to make work hours as flexible as possible.
 - Encourage unaffected employees to work with those affected to ensure the necessary business coverage is provided while those in need can have flexible schedules.
 - If your company has multiple locations, can employees from other locations be assigned *temporarily* to fill staff shortages? *The idea is to preserve the jobs of the people who are legitimately working to recover from the disaster.*
- 7) Clothing, uniforms, etc.
 - If certain dress codes exist, can they be relaxed? If employees have lost their belongings, can work clothes be provided? Providing "golf" shirts with the company logo for employees to wear (having enough to provide fresh ones each day) can be a real morale booster.
 - If your company sells or produces apparel, can seconds, overstock etc. be given to employees in need?
- 8) Food, water, over the counter medications etc.: Some employees may be having difficulty getting basic things such as food, water, medication and toiletries. To address employee needs for staples:
 - If possible, provide a meal at each shift.
 - Set up an office "food pantry" where employees in need can take what is needed. Perhaps the food pantry can be stocked by funds from the company and contributions from employees.
 - For employees that are immobilized, the supplies could be delivered by an employee volunteer.
- 9) Relocation: In some cases an employee may need to relocate, or a business may need to relocate. Consider ways you as an employer may assist in relocation:
 - Does the company have a similar facility or affiliate to where the relocating employee can transfer?
 - Can the company provide any help in facilitating the transfer?
 - Can the company provide the employee help in finding a new or temporary job?
 - Can the company provide services such as resume writing or job training?

- 10) Emotional concerns: Emotional reactions of employees and their family members may be a significant issue post disaster. It is wise to understand that emotional reactions are normal, and you may see employees reacting differently than you are used to. Common reactions include:
 - o Sadness, tearfulness
 - o Feeling edgy, easily upset
 - o Worry, anxiety
 - o Panic
 - o Anxiety with future weather events
 - o If you are concerned with an employee's reactions, consult with the EAP and possibly encourage the employee to seek EAP or other mental health support. TAKE ANY THREAT OF SELF HARM OR HARM TO OTHERS SERIOUSLY. Seek immediate help if that were to be the case.
- 11) Remember the less visible employees!
- 12) Leverage your corporate resources and connections!
- 13) If your company and employees are secure, work with your employees to consider how you can use your company skills and resources to help the communities that are impacted.
- 14) Remind eligible employees of their EAP benefits and encourage them to use them. As a manager, utilize the EAP resources.