

Managing business during adverse weather

Each winter there are periods when the snow causes problems for employees attending work. This might be due to transport difficulties or school closures causing child-minding issues. So, how can business manage under these circumstances? There are several things which can be implemented to ensure business continues with minimum disruption.

Alternative ways of working

1. Many employees are able to work from home. If so, ensure they take all the equipment and data with them once adverse weather reports are issued. This means staff can be productive even if they can't get in to the office. It is far better to have partially productive staff working at home than non-productive staff simply because they can't get into the office. This tactic will allow business continuity and at the same time will gain commitment from staff that will see the organisation as supportive.
2. If staff can't undertake projects or other paper work from home, are they able at least to manage their emails remotely using a 'web mail' access using their own Internet access? In some instances even private email may give a method of sustaining effort though the business needs for information security must be met. If any of this is possible, some aspects of the business can remain functional.
3. If the organisation has more than one location, are staff able to turn up at the nearest location to their homes? Again this may give a base level of effort to ensure the essential aspects of the business are maintained in each location.
4. Where staff can't work on projects related to their role, and can't get into another business location there are still options for them to work at home. Staff can review literature, undertake training via the internet and usefully use the time to move their own learning forward. It may also be possible to develop mini-projects which can be undertaken by staff; for example research on competitors.
5. Staff who make the effort to get in to the office are likely to be the most motivated staff. They are likely to offer to do whatever is needed to support the business. Ensure that where people do make it in consideration is given to their welfare on the return journey. It may be appropriate to consider a staggered end of day allowing those with longer and more difficult journeys to leave earlier than those who are within walking distance.

What can be done to manage staff who can't work from home, or attend work?

1. Managers are right to expect staff to make reasonable effort to get in to work. This may mean they leave for work much earlier than normal or walk instead of driving. Considering this, managers need to think what action they will take against those who don't get into work, and who are unable to be productive at home.
2. There are several options available where staff genuinely can't get to work, or be productive at home. One is to allow special leave (additional to holiday leave), another is to consider the time as holiday. Lost time could also be accrued with staff asked to make up the hours over a period of time based on business needs. A fourth option is to ignore the fact that people are unable to get in and to pay them as normal. This latter approach is unlikely to encourage staff to try and get into work, and gives no incentive to work from home.
3. Whilst managers are right to expect staff to do their best to get into work, the organisation has a duty of care to staff. It should be made clear that they should not take unnecessary risks when attempting to get to work. That said, staff should be able to provide supporting evidence of the problems they have had. Managers within the business are of course likely to be aware of the local weather, school closure and transport conditions which are likely to impact staff. This knowledge will help managers make informed decisions about what is 'reasonable effort' and what is not.

Planning ahead

1. All organisations should have a business continuity plan developed ahead of potential problems. See the white paper "Business Continuity Management" in the download area at www.timelesstime.co.uk.
2. Staff need to be told what options the organisation considers reasonable when attempting to get to work. Whatever policies are decided upon should be documented and made available to all staff. A suitable document (perhaps an Adverse Weather Policy) should be carefully drafted considering all options available to staff and the organisation.

The above is intended as general guidance. Call us on 07554 420419 if you want further advice or assistance in developing your business continuity plans.

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