



Disaster Recovery Fact Sheet

Managing your employees following a disaster

▼ CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY QUEENSLAND FACT SHEET

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MANAGING YOUR EMPLOYEES FOLLOWING A DISASTER

During natural disaster events it is highly likely that in addition to the direct business impacts, both you and your employees may well have been personally affected as well.

This fact sheet aims to provide a guide to some of the things you may want to consider as an employer to help you balance getting your business back up and running whilst also maintaining good working relationships with your employees.

IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE DISASTER

Once you have established the safety and security of your family, friend and home and you are refocusing your attention back on your business, the following points provides some tips on things you can do in relation to communicating with your employees.

You should contact all of your employees directly if you are a smaller company, or, contact each of your managers and delegate this responsibility to your managers if you have a larger company. You should aim to talk to every employee directly, don't just leave a message or send an email or text message.

Key questions you should ask and messages you should pass on include:

- Ask the employee if they are okay and if they have been affected. The answer to this question will help frame the rest of your conversation. An employee who has lost loved ones or their home will be more concerned about their personal situation than their employment situation. Someone who has not been affected may be desperate to know how they can help get the business back up and running.
- Advise employees how the business has been affected and what the immediate steps are to start the clean-up and rebuilding. Only tell employees what you know. If you don't know what is about to happen next, tell them that you don't know.
- If you know, tell employees how the disaster affects their employment. If you are going to have to stand them down without pay, let them know. If they need to take a few days annual leave while you sort out insurances and clean-up efforts, let them know. If it is possible that you may have to lose some positions, let them know that this may be the case but that you are doing everything possible to avoid this situation.
- Ask the employee if they need to take leave to deal with their personal circumstances. If an employee has their own clean-up to do at home, they have lost family or friends, or they volunteer, then the employee is likely to want to take leave to attend to these issues or responsibilities. Although you want to get the business back up and running, try to be flexible and accommodating to each individual situation.
- Offer access to your Employer Assistance Program if your business has one, or provide details for Lifeline if you have employees who need support to cope with the disaster. Some employees will have suffered personal trauma, others may not have directly experienced the disaster but still may be distressed by the events they have

seen in their neighbourhood or in the media. Your Employee Assistance Provider or Lifeline will be able to provide emergency counselling to assist these people.

REBUILDING AND RECOVERY PHASE

- Once the immediate crisis is over and the clean-up is mostly complete and you've had a chance to review the extent of the damage and get a handle on what you are going to need to do to rebuild the business, you need to ensure you continue to communicate with your employees.
- As soon as possible, confirm with employees how the disaster affects their employment. If you cannot afford to keep employees on and will have to close the business or make a number of positions redundant, let them know that discussions will be held as soon as possible. This is even more critical if they have been stood down with no pay as most people live from pay to pay and it may be causing stress.
- Tell employees what steps you are taking to rebuild the business and how long you anticipate it will be before things are back to "normal". All people like to have some certainty, even if the only certainty is that there is a long hard road ahead. Letting people know what your plans are will make them feel a lot more comfortable knowing that you want to rebuild the business and that they are part of that process.
- Let employees know you need their help and value their contributions. People will be far more willing to help rebuild the business, and will take more ownership of the success of the business if they feel they are valued and can make a positive contribution.
- Keep employees updated on what has been achieved and where you are up to with various recovery projects. If employees know what has been achieved they will see the progress being made and feel good that things are returning to normal. The more open and honest your communication, the more engaged, positive and helpful your employees will be.
- Keep employees up to date with your external marketing and communications. Make sure employees know what you are doing and saying externally to rebuild the business. This will also help them to answer questions and support your customers.
- Know that people will get stressed and upset during the recovery process and be prepared for this reaction. Recovery processes after a disaster will be a long and often painful process.
- People will get stressed and upset and may take this out on their colleagues or the business owner or manager. If this situation occurs, firstly try to calm the situation and talk to the person who is upset. If they are struggling to cope with all the changes or the slow progress to recovery, refer them to your Employee Assistance Program or to Lifeline for support.

The natural disasters that we have experienced have caused devastating destruction and will take months if not years to recover from. Our businesses and our employees will be pushed to capacity while we all rebuild. Engaging with your employees through good communication practices will enhance your relationship with your employees, as well as help you to rebuild your business more quickly.