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Is Your Business Prepared for Inclement Weather?

As winter brings colder air and the potential for ice or snow, it seems appropriate to spend some time reviewing your inclement weather policy.

The opening or closing of your business during bad weather is a matter of policy for each company to decide for itself. You will want to ensure you have the necessary policy and process in place and information disseminated to all employees well in advance of inclement weather. As with all policies, communication is the key to ensuring that employees are well informed and everyone is on the same page.

Many aspects of your business and each individual working with your organization are affected by inclement weather. Transportation concerns, commute time and distance, and other businesses and school closings will all impact whether each employee will be able to make it to work in times of severe weather. When either drafting or reviewing a policy for inclement weather, consider the following:

1. Communicate your written policy or plan for all employees in advance of any inclement weather.

Clear communication is the key to assuring your employees will know whether your business is open or closed due to weather. Determine what communication systems or means you will use to communicate your plan. Television and radio are extremely helpful but can take considerable time to provide completed lists in a timely fashion dependent upon when your business makes the call. Consider additional communication systems, a message center, call in procedures, email, or a combination of several.

Consider if there are key employees who must report and/or essential functions that must be performed regardless of whether the facility closes. Identify those essential employees and business functions, as well as other critical aspects (contractors, suppliers, business services and logistics) required to maintain your business operations in case of such a disruption. Explore how best to communicate with people who perform these essential functions and how you will communicate tasks and work direction.

2. Closing once everyone is at work.

Consider how you will shut down your business if inclement weather forces you to stop operations once everyone is at work. Communication with your management team to provide clear direction on the process to properly close the business will be imperative. Deciding which employees will be able to leave early or first and how many you need to delay leaving in order to efficiently close operations will require some pre-planning.

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3. Attendance and wage and hour issues must be considered.

Employees will need to know how weather related absences will affect their attendance. There are several scenarios to consider (i.e., company is open and employee does not feel safe driving; company is closed but employee can work from home; company opens late or closes early; employee does not get word of closing and reports to work, etc).

Employees must know how their pay will be affected. The guaranteed salary for exempt employees will be paid to avoid jeopardizing the exempt status if they have worked any portion of the week or they are ready and able to work when the decision is made to close. Non-exempt employees pay will be determined by the company policy, whether they are paid for a full day's work if the company closes, for part of the day, or for no hours at all. Your policy should address the use of vacation or any other paid time off for use during closing for inclement weather.

Preparedness, a written policy and excellent communication are the best practices to ensure you are prepared for any storm. Share your inclement weather plans with employees now and clearly communicate expectations.

Sample Inclement Weather Policy

In the event of inclement weather, normal working hours may be adjusted due to hazardous travel conditions. Based upon the most recent available weather conditions that affect the employees, the Management Team will determine whether or not the office will be open or closed for business or have a delayed opening to permit safe travel.

Employees are required to call the main telephone number in the event of inclement weather no earlier than 7:30 AM the day in question to determine the status of opening. The Company Answering System recording will state the status of business.

ABC Company encourages all employees to use discretion when determining the safety of travel to and from the office during inclement weather conditions. The safety and well-being of all employees are of the utmost importance.

If, in the Management Team's best judgment, the decision is made to close the office for business, all employees will be paid for the entire scheduled workday (*Variations*: all employees will be required to use PTO). In the event the employee feels that it is too hazardous to travel with the Company officially open, the employee is still required to notify their appropriate manager of their decision to remain at home. Non-exempt employees who choose to remain at home when the office is officially open for business will either be required to take Paid Time Off or take the day without pay. Exempt employees who choose to remain at home when the office is officially open for business will be required to take Paid Time Off.