

HR Insights

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Supporting Employees Before, During and After a Hurricane

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Atlantic hurricane season starts on June 1 and continues through Nov. 30. In recent years, hurricane season has become increasingly severe and devastating.

During hurricanes, heavy rains and winds pass through coastal areas, often damaging homes and businesses surrounding the impacted areas. While there is no way to avoid hurricane season, there are standard practices that can be utilized to help stay safe. Here are some tips employers can use to support their employees before, during and after a hurricane.

Before a Hurricane

Before the start of hurricane season, preparation is key. In order to be ready to respond and safeguard their employees when a hurricane prediction arises, here are some measures for employers to consider:

- **Plan evacuation routes.** Employees should be aware of all possible evacuation routes and options. Additionally, employers should designate specific individuals within their organizations to be responsible for helping communicate these options to employees.
- **Communicate any expectations.** It's vital for employers to communicate hurricane preparation information and related expectations with their employees. This could entail letting employees know if a hurricane is going to directly affect them, as well as expectations for evacuation.

- **Educate employees on how to properly prepare their homes for a hurricane.** This education may include best practices such as tracking valuable possessions and trimming trees.

Proper hurricane preparation can save organizations from panicking and engaging in last-minute planning when hurricane season arrives.

During a Hurricane

When a hurricane is about to hit, it's most important for employers to follow guidance from local officials and stay apprised of the latest weather updates. Employers should leverage these protocols when a hurricane is projected to hit the areas where their employees live or work:

- **Encourage employees to stay safe and protected.** This could entail providing employees with periodic weather updates and directing them to local news sources to remain informed.
- **Be specific about next steps after the hurricane has passed.** These steps could include when to return to work and where to seek additional support.

- **Empathize with employees.** Each employee may be in a different situation in terms of proximity to hurricane damage. Even if the majority of their employees aren't directly impacted by a hurricane, it's crucial for employers to be understanding and accommodating of those who are affected.
- **Communicate through multiple channels.** Many employees may be left without power or a way to communicate amid a hurricane, so it's best for employers to use several different channels to reach out to staff.

After a Hurricane

After a hurricane, the surrounding environment may be unstable. As such, employers should review their current work areas and follow local guidelines to determine appropriate next steps and continue supporting their employees. Here are some options employers can consider:

- **Provide volunteer efforts.** Following a hurricane, employees naturally may want to help those who have been displaced from their homes or are dealing with challenges from the aftermath of the event. With this in mind, employers may want to establish disaster relief initiatives that allow employees to come together and help their communities recover.
- **Offer recovery assistance.** Employees will need assistance after a hurricane hits. If employers can provide funding for their employees to recover, they should do so. If not, they should point them to organizations that can help.
- **Take note of challenges employees may be facing.** Many employees returning to work may be experiencing trauma from a hurricane. As a result, employers should be understanding and provide support to ensure their employees receive the help they need, such as mental health or financial assistance resources.

- **Prepare for future hurricanes.** Lastly, employers should review their organizational recovery plans. It's essential to do this shortly after a hurricane hits so any necessary adjustments can be made as quickly as possible.

Other Considerations

Natural disasters—including hurricanes—can create situations that implicate various employment laws. As it's virtually impossible to be completely prepared for natural disasters, employers should also be aware of these laws and their potential legal obligations. Due to the numerous laws that may apply during a natural disaster, employers are encouraged to seek legal counsel to discuss any specific issues and remain sufficiently prepared.

For More Information

Hurricanes are dangerous natural disasters that require proper planning to stay as safe as possible. By implementing effective preparation, response and recovery measures, employers can help their employees stay safe before, during and after a hurricane.

For more hurricane safety resources, contact Wallace Welch & Willingham today.