



Prepared for Winter?

Sudden cold snaps often find UK businesses under prepared. Everyone will remember the winter of 2010 with daily reports on how the country was grinding to a halt due to the snow. Many thousands of man-days were lost, resulting in missed business opportunities. So what can we learn from this experience and how can we ensure that we are better prepared over the coming winters?

Don't get caught out. Make sure your winter-busting plans and equipment are in place. Keep your staff and visitors safe and your business up and running by considering these simple suggestions:

Staff safety must always be priority

If your staff can make it into the office safely you must ensure the vicinity is safe for them. Make sure that all paths to your office are cleared of snow and ice and gritted. Clear the path more than once a day to stop any snow or ice hazards building up. If you have an office car park make sure that workers can enter and park their cars safely by removing excess snow and gritting the parking area.

A cold office results in uncomfortable employees that won't produce a high standard of work

It is essential that you plan ahead so that when the weather forecasters predict a drop in temperature you are ready and able to maintain a comfortable office temperature. Make sure you have your boiler serviced during the summer months in preparation for the coming winter.

Power failures

With snow comes the risk of power failures affecting not only your heating systems lighting and computers. Consider investigating sources of uninterrupted power supply.

Educate your Staff

Encourage any commuters or car-based workers to conduct winter-ready checks - check and replace the anti-freeze in the radiator, make sure your lights are clean and check the bulbs and replace the battery if it's not reliable. Ensure your tyres are correctly inflated and replace them if the tread has reached the legal minimum. Ask staff to carry items such as a blanket, spade, de-icer, ice scraper, torch, winter boots, food and perhaps a hot drink and a hazard triangle. They should ensure that their mobile phone is fully charged before going out on longer journeys. Winter 2009 and 2010 proved that it is not always sensible to ask staff to battle through the elements to reach the office.

The risks to safety are simply too great. Instead, with some forward planning and the introduction of a 'weather disruption' policy you can protect your business and keep things running.

Answering these simple questions will provide you with the basis for such a policy:

Can your staff answer calls from their mobile and home phones?

If not, your telecoms provider should be able to arrange for this. If you already have these facilities then dig out the instructions, put them on your company intranet so everybody knows how to activate the service when required to do so.

Can your staff view and reply to their emails from anywhere?

With email so readily available on so many devices, your customers won't be forgiving if you don't answer them promptly. Ensure that staff have access to their email from their home computers and that they know how to access it.

Can your staff work from any PC as if they were sitting at the desk in the office?

A remote desktop facility will allow your staff to work from any Internet based PC as if they were sat at their desk in the office. This means they can use everything they use at work: databases, accounts packages, specialist programs and even the printer. All programs and data remain secure and there is no possibility of virus infection between home and office computers. These facilities are the ultimate in staff productivity and are not only useful in bad weather but also allow mobile workers to be more productive the rest of the year.

Finally, make sure you have a policy in place which clearly states how staff will be treated if they are unable to make it to work or work from home. Can they take annual leave, unpaid leave, and time off in lieu? Whatever you decide, having a clear policy will avoid any misunderstanding and bad feeling.

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Note:

Whilst this fact sheet gives general guidance on the law relating to this topic at the time of drafting, it is not intended to be a comprehensive guide to this area of law. You are advised to seek specific advice in relation to any particular issues that need to be addressed in relation to this topic by a competent person.

