



Natural Disasters & Employee entitlements

IR Update February 2014

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Just recently, we have had a cyclone warning issued by the Qld Fire & Emergency Services (QFES) for far north Queensland. It is important for us to remember that as employers we must ensure not only our own safety but the safety of our staff. During times of natural disasters, many employers face difficulties in managing the continued operation of business under often difficult circumstances. To assist businesses in managing their business and staff during these times, below is an outline of entitlements and various options available to employers.

An employee can't come to work due to a natural disaster – if an employee is physically 'cut off' from attending work or they are required to care for themselves or family members it is important (where they can) to remain in communication with their employer. During these discussions the employee and employer can decide upon how the absence will be treated i.e. accrued paid leave

The employer has to temporarily close – if an employer is unable to continue operating the business as a result of a natural disaster, they need to determine employee entitlements during the closure. This may include offering a choice of taking accrued paid leave or standing employees down. You need to refer to your award or agreement for provisions concerning 'standing down' employees.

An employee volunteers to undertake community disaster relief activities – at times employees may be requested to volunteer to assist with community disaster relief activities via recognised emergency management bodies e.g. SES. The National Employment Standards (NES) entitles an employee who is a member of a recognised organisation to take a period of unpaid leave for the purpose of undertaking these activities.