

Creating an Inclement Weather Accommodation Plan for Employees

Inclement weather can be disruptive for employers and employees during the winter months across Washington State. As an employer, what can you do to assure adequate staffing needs are met?

1. Periodic employee handbook review and update. If you do not have inclement weather plan in place, initiate and define one now. Outline specifically how the employer will accommodate employees who agree to stay on-site to cover shifts for those employees who cannot make it in to work.
2. Create a communication plan. Ask employees if they are willing or able to stay on site during inclement weather conditions and then place them on the inclement weather on-call list.
3. On site accommodation plan. Determine employer and employee responsibilities of what the accommodations will entail, such as sleeping and eating locations within the facility.
4. Transportation during inclement weather. Your handbook should specifically note that how an employee gets to work is up to each employee and that the method or circumstances of the commute are not under the direction of the employer. Reference should be made to your on-site accommodation plan for employees concerned about being able to safely commute to work, on time, during inclement weather.
5. Determine critical and non-critical employees. Your plan should specifically identify critical and non-critical positions so that you can plan for adequate staffing in spite of inclement weather.
6. Explain how employees will be paid. Discuss with your employment law counsel how you will handle wage and hour issues associated with offering on-site temporary accommodations for staff during inclement weather.
7. Be flexible with staff scheduling. In cases of inclement weather, consider adjusting some staff schedules to accommodate the weather, if possible. Depending on the type of work the employee is performing, it may be possible for them to arrive earlier or stay later to deal with weather concerns. Some staff may have some limited options to work from home. In all cases, consider being flexible keeping hazard reduction in mind.