



Barbados Employers'
Confederation

Briefing Note: Disaster Management

Dear Member,

Natural disasters can occur at any time and especially during the annual hurricane season; **June 1st to November 30th**, we should expect and be prepared for the occurrence of torrential weather. This preparedness extends to the policies, systems and practices your organisation has in place for business operations in the event of bad weather.

We at the Barbados Employers' Confederation, recognise that guidelines for handling business in the event of bad weather are imperative. Not solely for the sake of employers, but for all employees to be well informed and provided with clear expectations.

We are aware, that varying industries, because of the nature of the services provided, may have to create policies and implement systems which are more complex than others such as hoteliers.

Private Sector Essential Services:

Utility companies, supermarkets, mini-marts, shops, pharmacies, general stores(including hardware and lumber yards), public transport providers and telecommunication providers.

Public Sector Essential Services:

Department of Emergency Management(DEM), Meteorological Department, Barbados Fire Service, Royal Barbados Police Force, Barbados Defence Force, Ministry of Health and associated medical facilities, transportation network and agencies involved in telecommunication, electricity, water and natural gas and other services that are essential to life.

Considerations

Under the **Safety and Health at Work Act 2005 Section 6 (5)** the General Duties states:

"It shall be the duty of every occupier to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all his employees."

Employers therefore have a duty of care to employees and are expected to firstly take action to preserve the life, health and safety of all employees'; visitors, clients and customers in the event of any pending natural disaster. Modern meteorology allows for advance warning of severe weather events such as hurricanes and storms. We urge employers to be mindful of the nature of their businesses and its necessity if there is pending severe weather.





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What is the BEC's position on Disaster Management?

It is our position at the BEC that **all organisations of non-essential services**, follow the direct orders as received from the DEM. As it relates to health, safety and security of employees, **it is the responsibility of all employers to eliminate the risk of injury or ill-health to employees as far as reasonably practicable**. Therefore, when an order for national shutdown is received from the DEM, as the competent body, we must comply with their request.

Recommendations

1. For **unionised** organisations, after the law, the collective agreement becomes the next authority for matters relating to employment relations. Employers and employees should discuss matters of emergency management at this level especially in circumstances where majority compliance and agreement is needed. **In the absence of a collective agreement** in your organisation, the development of a policy on emergency management should only be adopted after consultation with the employees. The Safety and Health at work Act gives employees the right to be informed and consulted on matters relating to their safety and health.
2. If a company **under the essential services** requires employees to be at work during national shut down, the company should conduct a suitable and thorough risk assessment as per the requirements of the Safety and Health at Work Act. The employer must contemplate each employee and their access and egress from the company, inclusive of their travel to and from work. Consideration must be made for road conditions, remoteness of their community, the dependency of their relatives on their presence (balancing work and life). The responses to these determining factors will eventually indicate the group of employees who can be rostered in the event of emergency/ shut down.
3. There needs to be a formal communication strategy to communicate with staff before, during and after any emergency. All employees should be informed of the channels of communication and the person responsible for determining when and if they can come into or leave work and the timeline in which to expect this communication.
4. During national shutdown, the organisation's policy should be clear on the transportation of employees and the routes these vehicles should take. **To make this determination the organisation must pay very close attention to the updates from the DEM through the various media houses.**





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Recommendations Continued

5. Contemplate the feasibility of staying at work for who are on duty while the national shutdown advisory was given. It may be safer for the employees who are already at work to remain at work as this reduces any risk involved with commute e.g. hotel staff. Please be reminded however that employees should not be forced or harassed into working under severe weather conditions and their consent should be given.
6. Employers are **NOT** legally required to compensate employees for days lost as a result of bad weather when they were not present. For employees who were required to be present, the organisation must determine payment rate for these employees. Take into consideration that some employees may inquire about an incentive if they believe they are jeopardising their safety.
7. An employee cannot be disciplined in any way for refusing to work during national shut down. Under the Safety and Health at Work Act the employee has the right to refuse imminently dangerous work. The only circumstance where this reason cannot hold, is in situations where the employer can prove that he conducted a suitable and sufficient assessment of risk where the risk did not pose serious harm to the employee.
8. The **ALL CLEAR** is provided by the **Director of Meteorological Services**, after determining that the weather system is no longer a threat to Barbados and will collaborate with the Director of the Department of Emergency Management on the issuance of the country's all clear.

Thank you and remember to be prepared and stay safe!

At the BEC we do understand that it may be complicated to implement and manage these emergency situations given the unpredictable nature of natural disasters. What we wish to reiterate is that emergencies also have expected outcomes, all of which the organisation should consider and seek to address. We urge all organisations to standardise their procedures in order to eliminate assumptions that can adversely affect your operation and your employees.

The Department of Emergency Management (DEM) is the advisory hub for all matters related to natural disasters. It should therefore, be your first point contact if you may be unclear about procedures or policies you are seeking to implement or compile that will take effect during a natural disaster.

Website: <http://dem.gov.bb/>
Telephone: (246) 438-7575

Members, contact us if you require further assistance
Tel: 435-4753 or Email: becon@barbadosemployers.com

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