



NATURAL DISASTER AND MAJOR WEATHER EVENTS

NATURAL DISASTER AND MAJOR WEATHER EVENTS SUPPORTING YOUR EMPLOYEES AFTER A NATURAL DISASTER OR MAJOR WEATHER EVENT

Whether directly affected through threat to personal property, evacuation orders, or worrying about family and friends in disaster-vulnerable areas, there is no predictability in reactions. Some people remain stoic and practical, even when they have been through great disaster, while others, who may have not even been directly impacted or near a natural disaster may demonstrate significant signs of anxiety. A sense of powerlessness may also be felt, due to lack of information and the relentless media, which can distort perception of the scale and threat of the disaster.

THE EFFECTS CAN LAST A LONG TIME

Do remember that impact is felt not just at the time of the disaster, but also in the days, weeks and months that follow. Also consider that as employers we have a duty of care. There are powerful legal and moral imperatives that oblige us to actively monitor and manage psychological risk.

STEPS YOU CAN TAKE AS A MANAGER:

IDENTIFY EMPLOYEES WHO MAY BE AFFECTED BY THE BUSHFIRES

- Use your internal knowledge and networks to identify employees who may be affected a natural disaster this season – both directly or indirectly. This is the active listening and intelligence gathering phase
- Actively check-in with staff about how they are travelling and whether they have any concerns about any of their work colleagues.
- Pay attention to employees who may still be on leave or, even importantly, not at work when they are meant to be.
- Don't make any judgements or assumptions about who will or will not be affected by the disaster.
- Be open to listening to the impact and needs being expressed by staff as this will guide what you can do practically to assist recognizing these may change over time.

PROVIDE PRACTICAL AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

You may not think you're the right person for this but you need to be prepared to support employees in relation to their concerns and needs in the times during or following any disaster.

- Help yourself by asking employees what type of support they believe would be most helpful.
- Others may be emotionally stretched or worrying about their job performance or even about losing their job. Reassurance may be all that is required.
- Others might need carers' leave to look after displaced, ill or aged family members for a defined period.
- Be open and flexible to respond in highly individualized ways to the needs of your employees.
- Seek internal support and guidance from your human resources/people and culture teams as they may have additional resources and suggestions for how support can be individually or collectively planned and provided.
- If you're not near the natural disaster and safely in the centre of one of Australia's cities, consider your employees may feel the need to help. Look at what charities and others are asking for and give staff choices about how to help, or how they can join in with an organisational response.

Interestingly, research tells us that it's usually the manager closest to the employee that is the most trusted and the most effective at providing reassurance and support following traumatic events such as bushfires. So, keep support local and focal even if there is a mass organizational response.

Find out more



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