COVID-19

We've all heard over and over again how to slow the spread of and keep people safe—to the point that everyone's pretty tired of it. But that's the problem. As the pandemic wears on, people are becoming lax about safety protocols—not washing their hands diligently, neglecting to wear masks when they should, violating gathering limits or physical distancing restrictions. Everybody has slipped up at one time or another, and that's understandable. This pandemic has required all of us to make enormous changes to our lives, and forced us to think consciously about things we used to do automatically. It's hard, but it's important, so remind employees of their role in outlawing this pandemic with COVID-19 Employee Health and Safety Training.

There's good reason to hope that a vaccine will become widely available in 2021, and that at some point this year life will start to look much more normal again, but that point isn't here yet. The other piece of good news is that the restrictions and precautions we've been taking do work if people adhere to them diligently. There have been outbreaks and flare-ups, yes, but these tend to occur where people ignore rules about gathering. Humans are social, and we want to spend time together. For everyone's safety, though, it's crucial we stay apart and encourage others to do the same, however difficult those conversations might be. We can overcome this pandemic, but we'll all have to continue making difficult sacrifices for the foreseeable future.

NATURAL DISASTERS

It's largely impossible to know when a natural disaster will occur, but knowing what kinds of disasters are likely is within every organization's power. For example, British Columbia is particularly vulnerable to wildfire, the Atlantic provinces face hurricanes, and almost everywhere in Canada is at risk of blizzards and floods. And while you can't say for sure whether a disaster will strike on Monday or Tuesday, for example, many potential cataclysms appear seasonally (though some of these seasons are becoming longer and less predictable lately), allowing you to make ready well in advance. Customize your Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity Planning Policy to account for the unique challenges and circumstances of your organization and environment.

But more than having a disaster preparedness strategy or business continuity plan, organizations should turn their attention to the long-term trends and how they can contribute to solutions. Individual choices and habits matter, but organizations are consumers, too—of energy, materials, and resources. Your company can make a bigger difference than any single person by examining how you use obvious resources like electricity and water, but also by examining the waste you generate. Beyond going paperless, look at other materials that come into your workplace. Can you reduce or reuse the packaging involved? What are you throwing away or wasting that you could change? As you work out your plan, develop an Environmental Policy (Waste Management) to explain your goals and procedures to employees and get them involved.

CIVIL UNREST AND MASS PROTESTS

Canada prides itself on its diversity, and legislation throughout the country prohibits discrimination on a wide variety of grounds. In practice, however, we don't always live up to these ideals, and in recent years, several popular protest movements have risen to demand better of governments, law enforcement, and private organizations. Companies that might never have considered themselves to have social responsibilities are increasingly expected to take firm stances on a range of issues, and more than that, to act against injustices.

Knowing how and when to get involved is difficult, but important. We all have roles to play in making our actions live up to our ideals. Organizations that don't see a place to participate publicly in these fraught and sensitive movements can still work internally to achieve related goals; uphold human rights, minimize bias in employment decisions, prevent violence and harassment, improve accessibility for all. These are steps that most employers must take under legislation anyway, but it's important not merely to fulfill the letter of the law, but its spirit, too, and to make sure that equality and justice aren't mere formalities, but lived realities.

The tensions and conflicts within our communities spring from real and deep pain, and afflict people in every part of their lives, including the workplace. Organizations have tremendous power and influence to address injustice and build better environments for staff and customers alike. We would all do well to embrace our strength.

FINAL THOUGHT

December 31, 2020, closed a trying, exhausting, stressful year for most of us, but we shouldn't pretend that it suddenly ended the problems last year exposed. It's probably fair to expect 2021 to be better than last year—or at least less of a parade of calamities—but there's nothing magical about the new year that'll make it so. If we want to see improvement in the world, we have to take responsibility for it. This means tempering our expectations somewhat, and recognizing that progress and positive change are slow and difficult, and not always steady, but the rewards for working together to make our workplaces, and our lives more generally, better for everyone are well worth the struggles we face along the way.

As you've probably guessed by now, it's still highly possible that challenging situations will arise in 2021 requiring changes in your organization. We can help keep you informed and provide support as changes occur that affect your business. We have thousands of documents in our library, including policy templates and articles; a few are listed in this guide, and we're always adding more as changes occur. Our Live HR Advice team has also answered hundreds of questions each month since the pandemic started for our members, and while we can't predict what this year will bring, we can assure you we'll be here for your business to provide you with as much support as we can. Talk to one of our representatives today to learn more.

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