

21 September 2010

MEAssist - Support for Staff

The time after the earthquake has been difficult for many, due to problems with workplace access, transport, additional family needs and personal trauma. This brings up questions around payment, and employer responsibilities that we circulated in an eNewsletter.

At times of great pressure on the community the legal framework is often only the starting point, we would like to get a feel what you have chosen to do in support of your staff.

Comments

- No temporary or permanent damage or business interruption and none of the employees are occupying accommodation that has been deemed uninhabitable (a few have missed water/sewerage for some days).
 - Some staff presented doctor's certificates claiming sick leave for stress/ anxiety etc for defined periods – this was treated as per normal ERA legislative requirements and/or employment agreement terms.
 - Some staff have asked for intermittent hours off to attend to repairs and related – the company paid for this.
 - Some staff asked for extended time off because they feel worried or distracted or anxious, this was granted but have not paid for the absence.
- Paid leave for all staff until a building inspection made and found safe for a return to work (two days total). One staff member was one week away from work until his house was "green stickered"; wages were covered for this period. Staff needs are assessed on an on-going basis. Continuing to work on finding flexible solutions so as not increase staff stress with regards to wages and salaries. The view is taken that staff and their families are the first concern. At this stage it is unclear as to what the insurance company will cover – but assume the worst.
- The business has run continually with the exception of the second largest shock creating a couple of cracks in walls. Staff were sent home on the working shift, and the following shift that evening was cancelled.
- The following was paid to staff for time off resulting from the earthquake:
 - Anyone who took leave between when the quake struck and 6am on Wednesday morning, 8 September was paid 'special leave' by the company (i.e. not deducted from their sick/annual leave). From this point it is on consideration of the circumstances, as determined by the person's manager. In some circumstances where persons exhausted themselves by assisting the business in the first half of the week, and needed time off after Wednesday special leave was also granted. Otherwise, after Wednesday 8 September earthquake-related leave can be taken as 'sick leave'. If the person has no sick leave it will be deducted from their annual leave entitlements.

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- The steps have been:
 - When working and operational but an employee chose not come to work because of personal circumstances they were offered the option of using holiday leave and the company did not pay people as it would have detracted from those who made the effort to get here and help sort the place out. Some had staff turn up to help a couple of hours after the first quake struck.
 - For an employee to use sick leave over this period a doctor's certificate was required.
 - On those days where an earthquake caused production to stop, for various reasons and staff were not required, they were paid and if the person was not needed they were paid as per their rostered days. For critical employees who helped with the run and cleanup on these days they were paid T1.5 in recognition of their help in trying conditions.
 - Information was communicated clearly and quickly to staff so they immediately knew where they stood in regards to these matters as the decision was made that there was enough stress just dealing with the effects of the earthquake and the aftershocks. The situation needed to be handled consistently, fairly and sensitively.