



# CRA BULLETIN

Issue 51 – 9 September 2010

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Dated: \_\_\_\_\_

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## AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE

### HEALTH AND SAFETY

As the clean up continues and more businesses look to return to operation following Saturday's earthquake in Canterbury, there is a range of **health and safety** and **employment relations** issues that employers and employees may be considering.

The advice here is designed to help businesses and their employees make good, safe, sensible and practical decisions in this difficult time.

**As a business owner or manager, you have to provide a safe workplace for your employees, contractors you might engage and others who might be entering your premises eg. customers. Make yourself aware of any requirements of the authorities (Civil Defence, regional and local authorities etc) and act in accordance with those requirements.**

**Don't rush in.** Stand back and make a sensible, safe plan for re-opening your workplace.

Here's a basic checklist of things you should consider before you open your workplace door:

**If you don't have the expertise to check these things in-house, get an expert in to assist you.**

- Check for basic building structural stability - note the City Council classifications: red placards for no entry, yellow for restricted use and green for no restrictions on a building's use
- Check for basic sanitation, e.g. running contamination free water
- Check that toilets are working
- Check that emergency exits and support equipment hasn't been compromised
- Check for live electrical cables or gas leaks
- Check the integrity of the water and sewage lines
- Check for unstable stock, equipment or machinery inside the building
- Check for chemical spills
- Check security issues – refer to the NZ Police or your security firm if you have concerns

- A full hazard identification should be made and plans to eliminate, isolate and minimise hazards where practicable
- Remember it is quite likely there are new and unusual hazards in your place of work that didn't exist last Friday. Your current hazard register should be considered inadequate

### **Recognise that the RIGHT DECISION is the SAFE DECISION**

#### Additional Information

#### **Whose responsibility is it to ensure the workplace is safe?**

This is the responsibility of the employer under the Health and Safety in Employment Act. The employer may need to obtain expert information to ensure safety and /or reassure employees of workplace safety.

#### **What safety gear should be used in clean up?**

The primary concern at all times should be individual safety. This means that appropriate protective clothing and equipment should be used when required. At a minimum, this would generally include heavy shoes/boots, a helmet and safety glasses and a protective jacket and trousers if required.

#### **How should concern about gas or chemicals in the workplace be dealt with?**

Evacuate immediately and ensure the relevant authorities are informed. The primary concern at all times should be individual safety.

#### **Does an employer have the right to require workers to go to work and help with clean up?**

This is an area for discussion on practical solutions. Employers want their businesses up and running to provide service to customers, and to be able to pay their employees. If employees are concerned about doing this work, they should discuss it with the employer and if they are being asked to do work they don't normally do, there should be a discussion about the employee's capability to do the work, and about supervision, and, especially, what protective gear employees will be provided with. The primary concern at all times should be individual safety.

### **EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS INFORMATION**

- **The key is communication.** This is an unusual situation, and much of it is probably not covered by employment agreements. It is very important that employers and employees are talking to each other.
- **Be flexible. This is a time for employers and employees to be understanding** and to take a commonsense approach to getting business up and running again.
  - ⇒ If employers are asking employees to do work they don't normally do (for example, clean-up work), both sides need to ensure they're comfortable with this, and safety must be top priority
  - ⇒ People may want to focus on family rather than work
- **Work together to find practical solutions**

- **Recognise that this has been a significant event**
  - ⇒ People will react differently in the aftermath - some may need extra support
  - ⇒ Many will want to focus on caring for their family
  - ⇒ Others will be best supported by assisting to get things up and running
- **An individual employee has the right to refuse to do work they consider unsafe.** Discuss the work and the concerns before it gets to this point. If you have decided it is safe, share your knowledge and reasoning with staff alongside the decision.

#### Additional Information

#### **Who decides if workers have to go to work if it is open?**

Employers and employees should talk to each other about what is happening with the workplace. Discuss and reach an appropriate agreement.

#### **If a staff member needs to stay home to look after their family – how does that work?**

Both parties should take a practical approach to this situation. Employers should discuss the employee's needs in these circumstances, recognising the unique nature of the event, the disruption it has caused and the need for flexibility.

#### **If an employer has concerns that are not being resolved, what should they do?**

You may contact the Department of Labour on 0800 20 90 20 between 8.30am and 5.00pm Monday to Friday and you will be connected to appropriate services to assist.

View information on **health and safety** and **employment relations** issues that employers and employees may be considering in the wake of the Christchurch earthquake. <http://www.dol.govt.nz/quake2010/>