

Newsletter: October 2017



AFTER THE FIRESTORM

Recovery Strategies for Employers

Everyone has been impacted in some way by the catastrophic fires that recently ravaged our beloved Sonoma County, and Leap Solutions Group is no exception. All of us were evacuated from our homes and sought refuge with neighbors, friends and family. One of our team members is still displaced, and another is regrettably among the many thousands who lost their homes entirely.

Residents are returning to their homes and workplaces or sifting through the sites where they once stood, and businesses are resuming operations where possible. As our community begins to cope with devastating losses, employers and employees find ourselves managing situations we never could have anticipated.

At Leap Solutions Group, we are heartened to see Sonoma County already proving to be stronger and more resilient than ever. As you and your organization navigate toward your new normal, we encourage you to start with these areas:

Commitment. Now is the time to reaffirm your commitment to each and every employee in your organization.

Take roll call to confirm the safety of all, and check in personally and continually to assess the unique, immediate and ongoing needs of each individual. Provide resources in different languages as appropriate, and remember to perform workplace safety checks.



Flexibility. For most of us, a disaster of this proportion is unprecedented. Providing flexibility to your employees can go a long way toward easing their stress levels during these unusually intense times. Temporary modifications—whether in the form of adjusted work hours, work-from-home arrangements or other creative ways to meet personal needs—might not be in keeping with your company’s existing policies, but extraordinary times may well call for makeshift measures. You must, of course, remain compliant with local, state and federal regulations throughout the recovery period. As you determine what works best in this particular situation, you may choose to incorporate a version of these modifications into a formal disaster policy.

Compassion. Employers can’t fix everything, but we can certainly do our part to support the emotional wellness of our employees. People cope with trauma in very individual ways, so it’s key to meet everyone where they’re at and manage our own perceptions, assumptions and expectations accordingly. Some have experienced unimaginable losses, others may seem fine but actually harbor some form of survivor guilt, and most everyone is in varying stages along the recovery process. Give your employees the freedom to talk openly about how they were impacted and what their future plans might be, help them look into their benefits packages for free or low-cost counseling sessions, and communicate widely about any and all mental health support services you know to be available to them, including California state Employee Assistance Program (EAP) offerings where applicable.

Service. Many people feel understandably paralyzed after trauma, but volunteering can be a great way to get out of the immediacy of our current situation, regain perspective, renew purpose and focus on a brighter future. Inspire your employees with any of the countless feel-good stories of how the disaster has already brought out the best in our community, and look for ways this shared tragedy might actually provide a rare opportunity for employers to galvanize our teams in the spirit of service.

Further, we urge clients, employees, self-employed individuals and businesses to look into the many resources available to support ongoing recovery efforts, including (but not limited to):



Local Community Resource

<https://www.sonomacountyrecovers.org/>

Information site for recovery efforts *related to the Sonoma County fires*. This is an official page for the [County of Sonoma](#) and [City of Santa Rosa](#) and is a resource for all things concerning these unprecedented disasters that have affected our community.

California Employment Development Department (EDD)

http://edd.ca.gov/About_EDD/Disaster_Related_Services.htm

(also available in Spanish)

The California Employment Development Department (EDD) provides a variety of services to people and businesses impacted by disasters in California. These range from assistance for people who may have lost jobs due to the disaster to employers who are forced to shut down operations.

The Governor has issued a State of Emergency proclamation, and the President has issued a Federal Emergency Disaster Declaration for the California wildfires. For these disasters, the one-week waiting period for unemployment insurance benefits is waived, and Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA) benefits are available for people who are not eligible to receive regular state unemployment benefits.

Note: The EDD encourages anyone out of work due to these wildfires to apply for unemployment benefits through either the state or the federal unemployment insurance program. *The deadline for filing claims is November 16, 2017.*

Employer Services

http://edd.ca.gov/Payroll_Taxes/Emergency_and_Disaster_Assistance_for_Employers.htm

Employers directly affected by the disaster may request up to a 60-day extension of time from the EDD to file their state payroll reports and/or deposit state payroll taxes without penalty or interest.

Local Assistance Centers (LACs)

<http://www.oesnews.com/local-assistance-centers-are-available-for-wildfire-victims-in-california-counties-in-orange-sonoma>

Local Assistance Centers (LACs) are open to assist those impacted by the California wildfires. LACs include representatives from the EDD and other local, state and federal agencies, non-profit and voluntary organizations with disaster assistance programs and services, including unemployment benefits and payroll tax extensions for employers.

Disaster Loss—California Franchise Tax Board (FTB)

<https://www.ftb.ca.gov/individuals/disaster.shtml>

For California purposes, a casualty loss becomes a disaster loss when both of the following occur: (1) you sustain the loss in an area the President of the United States or the Governor of California declares a state of emergency, and (2) you sustain the loss because of the declared disaster.

Taxpayers may deduct a disaster loss for any loss sustained in California beginning on or after January 1, 2014 and before January 1, 2024. You can claim a disaster loss in the taxable year the disaster occurred or in the taxable year immediately before the disaster occurred. The advantage of claiming a loss in the prior year is that the loss will generally reduce the prior-year tax liability, generating a refund that Franchise Tax Board (FTB) can issue quickly.



Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

<https://www.fema.gov/>

The mission of FEMA is to support citizens and first responders to ensure that as a nation we work together to build, sustain, and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from and mitigate all hazards.

DisasterAssistance.gov

<https://www.disasterassistance.gov/>

The mission of the Disaster Assistance Improvement Program (DAIP) is to provide disaster survivors with information, support, services, and a means to access and apply for disaster assistance through joint data-sharing efforts between federal, tribal, state, local, and private-sector partners. The Disaster Assistance website allows you to:

- [Find](#) disaster assistance that meets your personal needs
- [Apply](#) for disaster assistance and reduce the number of forms you have to fill out

- [Check](#) the status of your application
- Find a FEMA [Disaster Recovery Center](#) (DRC) near you
- Find a [hotel](#) or a new [place to live](#)

Benefits.gov

<https://www.benefits.gov>

Benefits.gov is the official benefits website of the U.S. government, with a mission to reduce the expense and difficulty of interaction with the government while increasing citizen access to benefit information. The website provides online access to information from 17 federal agencies.

Internal Revenue Service (IRS)

<https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/tax-relief-for-victims-of-wildfires-in-california>

Special tax relief and assistance is available to taxpayers in Presidential Disaster Areas.

Insurance Carriers

Consult with your individual insurance carrier and policy for benefits you might not realize you have, such as business interruption insurance.

Small Business Administration (SBA)

<https://www.sba.gov/offices/disaster/dfocw/resources/1592350>

The SBA offers disaster assistance in the form of low-interest federal loans for businesses of all sizes, private non-profit organizations, homeowners and renters to repair or replace damaged or destroyed real estate or property. Loan amounts and terms are set by the SBA and are based on each applicant's financial condition. The SBA works alongside FEMA at Disaster and Business Recovery Centers, where disaster survivors are able to apply in person and get counseling on the next steps toward recovery.

Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

<http://www.eap.calhr.ca.gov/home-page.aspx>

State of California Employees and eligible dependents have access to an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). EAP offers completely confidential, no-charge, face-to-face counseling or telephone coaching for state employees, managers, supervisors, and eligible dependents 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

At Leap Solutions Group, our hearts are with you and our door is open as we, together, begin to recover and rebuild.



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