

Weathering the Storm

When extreme weather strikes, do employer actions meet employee expectations?



This study surveyed U.S. employees and business leaders, specifically people managers, human resources professionals, and executives, to understand the state of workplace readiness compared to employee expectations in the event of weather-related crises, including blizzards, earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, tornados, wildfires, and other natural disasters.



PLANNING FOR THE WORST

Get ahead of the storm by clearly communicating expectations to employees

Employees seek insight from leaders

On average, employees expect communication about expectations that affect their schedule at least 3.4 days out from a pending natural disaster or extreme weather event.

COMMUNICATING CLEARLY

Employees expect to be kept in the know

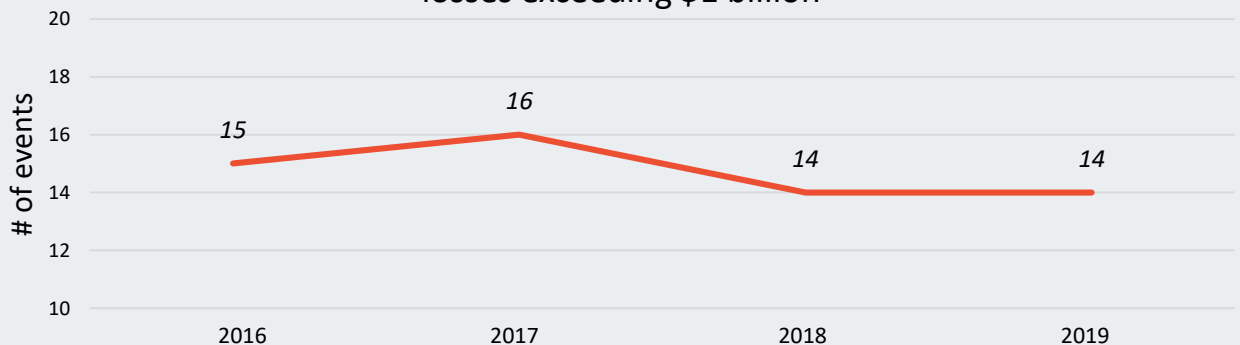
Align corporate strategies with shifting employee expectations

Before any disaster strikes, it's imperative that leaders get ahead of the storm by understanding what employees want to see happen at the workplace in the event of a natural disaster or extreme weather. This is particularly important as record-breaking and financially straining natural disasters and extreme weather events continue to impact the U.S. year after year.

Although employers generally feel prepared to manage the workplace in the event of a natural disaster or extreme weather, there is a clear disconnect between how employers and employees feel: While nearly two-thirds (65%) of employers say they've made employees aware of how their organization is prepared for a disaster in the past 12 months, more than a third (35%) of employers admit they have not taken any measures to share their disaster preparedness plan in that same timeframe.

In fact, less than half (45%) of employees say their employer has discussed generally what would happen at the workplace in the event of a natural disaster or extreme weather event — leaving room for employees to grow anxious or concerned about what they should do at work and how it could impact their job.

Natural disasters and extreme weather events in the U.S. with losses exceeding \$1 billion



NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information, Billion-Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters: Overview (April 8, 2020), found at <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/billions>.

In the eye of the storm, emphasize employee communication

Although employee communication is one of the top workplace concerns for nearly a third (31%) of employers in the event of a natural disaster or extreme weather, it's also their biggest weakness: For nearly 1 in 5 (17%) employers, employee communication — e.g., confirming safety, letting employees know whether they need to work — is the area they feel they are *least* prepared to handle in the event of a natural disaster or extreme weather.

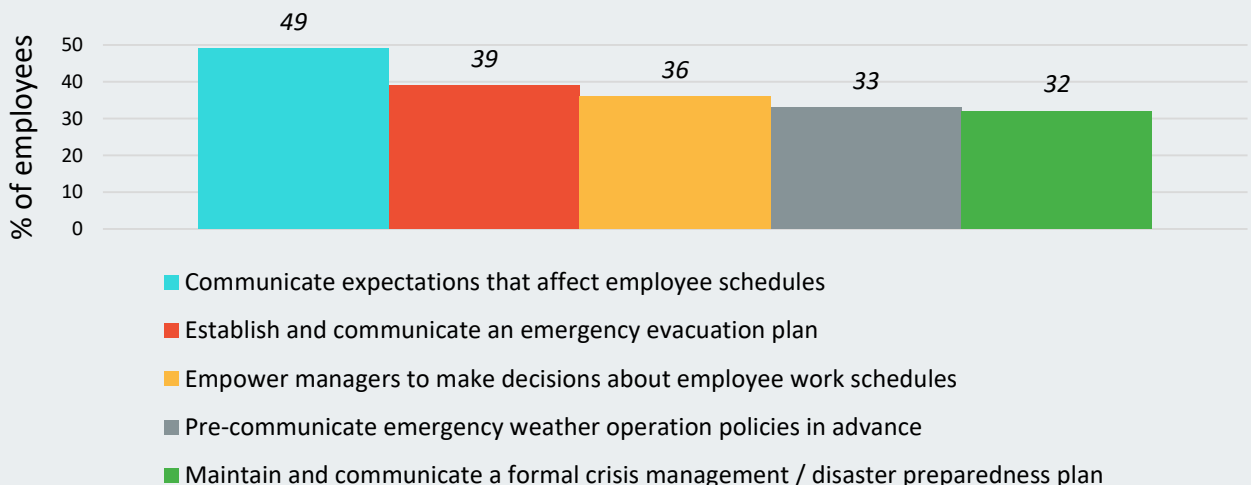
- Other areas where employers do not feel fully prepared include: ensuring IT/data stability (15%); employee safety, including commuting to and from the workplace while working during a natural disaster or extreme weather (15%); and recovery back to normal operations (14%).

In addition to receiving clear work expectations from their employer (34%), employees want to know that they can reach their employer when disaster strikes: Almost a third (31%) of employees are concerned about being able to get in touch with their employer during a natural disaster or extreme weather event.

On the bright side, many employers have the technology in place to encourage communication in the event of a natural disaster or extreme weather: Three in 5 (61%) employers say they have a solution to reliably communicate with employees, and, more specifically, 2 in 5 (40%) have emergency mobile/SMS employee notifications in place to respond in a time of crisis. This is particularly critical, as 1 in 5 (19%) employees believes enabling mobile communication shows their employer is committed to employee safety.

In addition to providing general business updates, communicating about pay and work is equally important for organizations to consider, but is an area of opportunity: Half (54%) of employers feel they have systems in place to pay employees accurately and on time in the event of a natural disaster or extreme weather, while more than a quarter (28%) have a real-time mobile scheduling solution to ensure shifts are covered.

How U.S. employees want their employer to show commitment to employee safety in preparation for a natural disaster or extreme weather





FINDING AUTHORITY

Employees should receive business-related updates — specifically from their manager

Managers lack autonomy...

...yet many employees think their manager has the authority to make decisions and communicate in the midst of a natural disaster or extreme weather event.



EMPOWERING MANAGERS

Managers need the keys to communication

Enable managers to communicate real-time decisions

Less than half (49%) of employers say people managers are permitted to decide when and how to respond to a natural disaster or extreme weather without waiting for senior or corporate leadership to approve. This can be unexpected and removes the independence needed to make decisions quickly.

In fact, a third (33%) of people managers say, at their own company, people managers are not authorized to communicate important updates to employees, with 1 in 10 (10%) saying they're also not authorized to do any of the following:

- Determine whether to close a facility;
- Determine when and how to respond to a weather event;
- Tell employees to go home, stay home, or route employees to a different location; or
- Ask people to come back to work after a disaster.

Many people managers may feel employees in their role are authorized to make decisions, but HR and leadership have a different view. For example, 2 in 3 (67%) people managers say, at their own company, people managers are authorized to communicate important updates to employees during a natural disaster or extreme weather, but just over half (55%) of HR and leadership would agree.

However, employees think their managers *do* have autonomy: Three-quarters (75%) of employees think their manager is empowered to make decisions that affect them (e.g., sending employees home early or telling them to work from home without corporate approval) in the event of a natural disaster or extreme weather.

49%

of people managers are not permitted to decide when and how to respond to a weather event without waiting for approval from senior or corporate leadership.

75%

of employees think their manager is empowered to make decisions that affect them in the event of a natural disaster or extreme weather.

Remain transparent before, during, and after crises

Leaders can ease employee concerns by taking the time to understand their needs and open the lines of communication to establish trust. Consider, for instance, that nearly a third (29%) of employees are concerned about employer retaliation — such as receiving reduced shifts or having fewer opportunities for promotion — if they have to miss work due to a natural disaster or extreme weather event.

It's imperative for leaders to communicate through disaster, including before any event occurs; when managers openly communicate their own approaches and expectations to their workforce ahead of time, they can quickly quell these feelings of concern and anxiety from the get-go.

Amid unexpected hurricanes, tornados, and disastrous wildfires, establishing regular and real-time communication channels between employees and employers is a key step to building an engaging and trusting culture. This should be reinforced by the fact that, even if formal disaster preparedness plans haven't been communicated, employees generally believe their company's heart and priorities are in the right place: The majority of employees feel their managers are empowered to make decisions that affect them in the event of a natural disaster or extreme weather (75%) and believe their employer takes disaster preparedness seriously (73%).

When it comes to real-time communication, it's important to note that leaders believe different responsibilities lie with different stakeholders within the organization. For example, in the event of a natural disaster or extreme weather, at least half of employers believe HR and operations are responsible for:

- Communicating important updates to employees (58%);
- Telling employees to stay home or routing them to different locations (50%); and
- Communicating payroll issues to employees (50%).

Above all else, when it becomes clear that an impending natural disaster or extreme weather may impact a specific work location, employees see communication about expectations that affect schedules (49%) and relevant business updates (39%) as a way for employers to show they are committed to employee safety and care about employees, respectively — particularly when the majority (63%) of employees say they would be expected to work during a natural disaster or extreme weather event.

29%

of employees are concerned about employer retaliation if they have to miss work due to disaster.

73%

of employees believe their employer takes disaster preparedness seriously.

63%

of employees expect to work during a natural disaster or extreme weather event.



TREATING FEAR WITH TRUST

Reinforce steady communication by focusing on the shifting employee experience

Alleviate concerns with a culture of caring

Employees should feel safe, respected, and cared for throughout the year — regardless of impending natural disasters or extreme weather events.

CULTIVATING CULTURE

For employees, caring is more than a buzzword

Listen to top employee concerns

As organizations develop and evolve disaster preparedness strategies and their associated communications over time, it's important to account for top employee concerns in the event of extreme weather.

38%

of employees are concerned about perceived reliability if they have to miss work.

Employees' disaster-related concerns revolve around workplace presence:

1. Commuting (58%);
2. Finding someone to cover their shift if they're unable to make it to work (40%);

3. Securing child, family, or pet care while at work (39%);
4. Being late to work (39%); and
5. Perceived reliability if they have to miss work (e.g., would their manager or coworkers think less of them?) (38%).

More than a third (35%) of employees are also concerned about feeling burned out during a natural disaster or extreme weather event due to working overtime, picking up shifts for affected employees, and more. However, just 9% of employers view burnout or fatigue as one of their top three workplace concerns during a natural disaster or extreme weather.

Bolster the employee-manager relationship

The first step to ensuring employee safety is bolstering

the relationship between employee and manager.

Startlingly, about 1 in 4 employees doesn't feel their employer (27%) or manager (23%) cares about them.

23%

of employees don't feel their manager cares about them.

Considering three-quarters (75%) of employees feel their manager is empowered to make decisions that affect them during a natural disaster or extreme weather, it's important for managers to continue to communicate regularly and transparently — regardless of their ability to make business decisions when disaster strikes.

Offer people-centric benefits

Should a natural disaster or extreme weather impact the workplace, employees have a handful of expectations about what their employer should do to show they care, including:

- Offering paid time off for employees unable to work due to natural disaster-related conditions (37%);
- Offering food, shelter, and support services to impacted employees and their families following a disaster (35%);
- Offering unpaid time off for those who need it (28%); and
- Allowing employees to donate their paid time off to impacted coworkers (20%).

37%

of employees believe employers should provide paid time off for employees unable to work due to natural disaster-related conditions to show they care about employees.

The good news? Some employers say their organization can meet these expectations.

And for employees who must be present to do their jobs in the event of a natural disaster or extreme weather, employers say their organization would:

- Offer free meals (32%);
- Provide accommodations near the office for employees (28%); and
- Provide childcare or family care financial assistance (11%).

40%

of employers would allow employees to work from home or decline to work a scheduled shift without recourse if disaster strikes.

Provide flexibility to work safely

While 3 in 10 (30%) employers would offer paid time off for employees unable to work due to disaster-related conditions, just 40% would allow employees to work from home or decline to work a scheduled shift without recourse.

These options for employee flexibility should happen in as close to real time as possible. Nearly half (49%) of employees

think their employer should communicate expectations that affect schedules as soon as it's apparent a natural disaster may impact a work location, and more than a third (36%) expect a minimum of 24 hours' notice if a natural disaster or extreme weather is pending.

Commit to the community

Employers are prepared to care for more than their employees: In the event of a natural disaster or extreme weather event, more than a quarter would make a corporate financial donation to support impacted employees (28%) or to a charity (25%).

28%

of employers would make a financial donation to support impacted employees.

Additionally, a third (34%) of employers would assemble volunteer teams to assist in response and recovery, and 27% would offer food, shelter, and support services to non-employees in the community.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

The “Weathering the Storm Study,” commissioned by The Workforce Institute at Kronos Incorporated and conducted online by The Harris Poll, surveyed U.S. employees and business leaders, specifically people managers, human resources professionals, and executives, to understand the state of workplace readiness compared to employee expectations in the event of weather-related crises, including blizzards, earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, tornados, wildfires, and other natural disasters.

THE WORKFORCE INSTITUTE AT KRONOS

The Workforce Institute at Kronos Incorporated is a think tank that helps organizations drive performance by addressing human capital management and workforce management issues that affect both hourly and salaried employees. Through education and research, The Workforce Institute empowers organizations with practical ideas for optimizing the 21st-century workplace. Board members and key stakeholders publish articles and insights through The Workforce Institute blog at www.workforceinstitute.org.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more on the research, please contact:

Daniel Gouthro
Kronos Incorporated
1 978.947.7310

daniel.gouthro@kronos.com

For more on how Kronos can help your organization address employee engagement and other key workforce management issues, please email Kronos at educate@kronos.com or visit www.kronos.com.

Survey Methodology

Employee survey: This survey was conducted online in the U.S. by The Harris Poll on behalf of The Workforce Institute at Kronos Incorporated from April 8-15, 2019 among 336 respondents meeting each of the following criteria: aged 18 or older; employed full-time or part-time; not employed in an education industry; employed with a company with 15 or more employees; who does not work remotely. Results are weighted on age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region, and household income to align with the actual proportion of the population under study. Propensity score weighting was used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

Employer survey: This survey was conducted online in the U.S. by The Harris Poll on behalf of The Workforce Institute at Kronos Incorporated from April 8-15, 2019 among 326 respondents. Respondents represented their employers and may have qualified in one of two capacities: (1) 'HR Leader, VP, or C-Suite' (required to work full-time or part-time; not employed in an education industry; employed with a company with 15 or more employees; and either works in HR as a manager, director, or VP, or operates in a VP or C-Suite capacity) or (2) 'People Manager' (required to work full-time or part-time; not employed in an education industry; employed with a company with 15 or more employees; does not work in HR; and manages at least three direct reports). Results are weighted based on the size of the employer to align with the distribution of company size in the U.S. (excluding businesses with fewer than 15 employees).

Respondents for both surveys were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in The Harris Poll surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the online panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

© 2020, Kronos Incorporated. Kronos and the Kronos logo are registered trademarks and Workforce Innovation That Works is a trademark of Kronos Incorporated or a related company. For a full list of Kronos trademarks, please visit the “trademarks” page at www.kronos.com. All other trademarks, if any, are property of their respective owners. All specifications are subject to change. All rights reserved. CV0634-USv1