



Supporting employees following floods

14 Feb 2020

Floods are a natural process and can be caused by several factors. Floods impact on individuals and communities, and have social, economic, and environmental consequences.

Flood consequences can be immediate or long-term and include:

- Individual impacts
 - Danger at the time, including injury and loss of lives
 - Anxiety, stress, and fear of re-flood
 - Impact on relationships with friends and family
 - Damage to property and possessions, including loss of sentimental possessions
 - Disruption and displacement of living conditions (with varying lengths)
 - Financial strain
- Community, business, economic, infrastructure, tourism, agriculture, and environmental impacts.

In addition to these primary consequences, individuals may also experience secondary impacts, due to ongoing stress when dealing with loss

It is important we try to minimise these potential secondary causes of ongoing stress by:

- **being aware of our communication with our employees, and the stress they are undergoing.**
- **communicating warmly with empathy, patience, and compassion**
- **understanding the stress they may be feeling, and their individual situations.**

Be prepared

Advise employees:

- The steps to take to prepare and respond to floods within the workplace.
- Do NOT enter flood waters, on foot or within vehicles.
- Throw away food and water that has come into contact with flood waters.
- Use boiled or bottled water for drinking, cooking, and cleaning.
- Seek safety away from flood waters, and areas previously damaged by the floods.
- Be aware of your surrounds, with floods impacting the environment including increased wildlife presence (i.e., snakes and mosquitos), fallen trees or powerlines, water and electricity supplies.
- Depending on damage, do not enter properties until informed safe to do so.
- Contact emergency services if needed.
- Remain up to date with flood warnings and advice.
- Contact services for assistance with their practical needs and wellbeing.

Procedures

- Detail actions within OH&S procedures for flooding, including flood risks
- Make clear the steps and actions to take

During and after the flood

- Locate employees and direct them away from flood waters.
- Check-in with employees that may be impacted by the floods.
- Provide flexible working arrangements, as discussed with employees.
- Encourage employees to contact services as needed.
- Carefully listen to employees' needs, allowing time for them to gather their thoughts.
- If the workplace is impacted, once clean-up can begin, provide employees full protective wear (boots, full clothing coverage, masks and gloves) to ensure safety.
- Try to encourage positive self-care behaviours:
 - Quality sleep
 - Good nutrition and exercise
 - Maintaining friendships and regular routines
 - Engaging with their community, including assisting those in need and receiving assistance. Community responses can increase resilience.
 - Seek professional help when feeling distressed.
- Ensure that managers are monitoring themselves and other employees for signs of stress or overwork.
- If an employee is struggling to cope, or is using negative coping strategies (rumination, overconsumption or self-medication), you may need to connect them with counselling services (Employee Assistance Programs).
- Make employees aware of the Employee Assistance Program services available.
- Remember individuals may respond differently to trauma, and the impact can often be long lasting.

Be aware:

- Floods can impact the number of staff available to work
- This can lead to increased job demands, stress and exhaustion for available working staff
- Be aware and provide additional support during these times.

Remember the psychological health impacts are often more severe and longer lasting than the physical impacts.

Contacts

Disaster Welfare Assistance line:
1800 018 444

NSW Rural Assistance Authority:
1800 678 593

Agriculture and Animal Services Hotline:
1800 814 647

NSW State Emergency Services (SES):
132 500

Department of Communities and Justice Housing Contact Centre:
1800 422 322

Australian Government disaster recovery assistance hotline:
180 2266

Red Cross Inquiry Centre:
1800 727 077

NSW Mental Health Line:
1800 011 511

Lifeline:
13 11 14

Beyondblue:
1300 224 636

Healthy Minds:
1300 160 339

