



# Get Caught “Again” By A Snow Apocalypse And You'll Have No One To Blame But Yourself

Insights

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Laura Stack posted an excellent INC. article, [“You Can’t Stop A Polar Vortex, But You Can Be Ready For The Next One.”](#) While I travel constantly, I live in Atlanta, so this is a visceral subject to me both as a “*Catastrophe Manager*” and as an Atlanta employer. When Atlanta businesses, government, and schools all decided to release everybody at the same time, I had a first hand seat to witness poor planning and decisions. My secretary got home at 2:00 a.m., my best friend at 5:00 a.m., and others slept in their cars or at Publix, Kroger and CVS stores who graciously let people sleep in the store. I was out to the wee hours rescuing people because I had a good vehicle and outdoor skills, which does not alter the fact that all of us were caught with our proverbial pants down. For a fascinating hour by hour description of Atlanta’s misfortune, complete with images of weather forecasts and communications, read [“How To Prevent the Next Atlanta Snow Apocalypse”](#) by the seasoned weather hands of Minnesota Public Radio.

Our latest U.S. economic numbers reflect the adverse effect of this year’s weather disruptions, so we had better learn some lessons from this year’s misfortunes.

Over the years, I have spent hundreds of hours working with clients to develop simple and “*creative*” plans for their locations to respond to workplace deaths, pandemics, workplace fatalities, OSHA inspections, ice storms, “Katrina” events, OSHA inspections, union corporate campaigns and electromagnetic pulses (that one is scary). Nevertheless, this winter has shown a weakness in most employer’s plans.

Before I go further, INC.s article reported that:

## **Surveys show that only one in three businesses even have a disaster plan.**

Not only is this disturbing, but it suggests that a lot of employers would look blankly at me when I ask about their “Emergency Action Plan (EAP), annual fire extinguisher training and a host of other widely misunderstood OSHA requirements.

Step one, gather information. Our Firm is surveying staff to develop a clear understanding of the effects on staff and “why,” as well as impediments to working remotely. Second, while plans must be site-specific, mesh your entire system. We have 35+ offices who can support one another. Set up and publicize automatic procedures for offices to support those in a closed office. Next, don’t be bashful. Telecommuting is widespread but many employers are still reluctant to go down that road,

even in emergencies. I don't blame you, but most challenges are manageable. First, second and third, consider data security. In this era of tablets and memory sticks, most employers' data is already dangerously exposed. Remember that little NSA scandal? Trust me, if you have lots of locations, you're not prepared.

Next, deal with the regulatory issues. Yes, you will have to take steps to ensure that employees properly record all time worked. There will be some abuse, but hey, you're managers, you can deal with those exceptions. To quote INC., *"take advantage of the cloud."*

I know that the phrase *"think outside the box"* is overused, but do it! Squared away businesses with diverse business units do so. One huge communications firm has a **"what if" committee**. Hospitals already maintain plans to keep staff onsite over night; maybe you need such a plan. Is it better to have an employee spend 12 hours driving and then sleep in their car?

Stay ahead of the curve. Georgia government authorities "briefly" tried to blame the meteorologists, but the meteorologists dutifully reported the hour-by-hour changes in the Atlanta storm's trajectory and severity. "In advance," have a system in place to track developing data.

In Atlanta, we normally close schools when someone even spills their milkshake on the interstate, so we had no excuse for our delay in acting. And when we did, our lock step actions shamed even the lemmings marching off their cliffs (note: the whole lemming thing is exaggerated, but the analogy is too good to discard). Track and act.

As INC. says, *"don't be out of pocket."* We did ok on this count. Our lawyer and non-lawyer management was always available. My professional focus requires a decidedly unhealthy 24-hour availability. I carry two I-phones and an I-Pad. You don't need my unhealthy habits, but you do need to plan with the assumption that the second and even third contacts may be unavailable. Even more importantly, if you have numerous locations, build a corporate response team to take up most of the burdens of the location that has been smitten with ice storms, tornadoes, or a hail of frogs and locusts. This well prepared corporate response is especially important in the case of catastrophes and fatalities, where disruption and emotions will render local management incapable of doing much more than emergency response. Be ready to roll the regulatory, legal, employee, public relations and benefits assistance. Practice this process and communicate its availability. In recent years, I have written a great deal about "Pandemic Planning." This year's stories suggest that we need to revisit the entire area of "business disruption."

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