

Power Restored in Louisiana Following Hurricane Ida: Now What?

By Michael Brian Taylor

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Weeks after Hurricane Ida tore through the region, damaging thousands of businesses and flattening the power grid, the power was mostly restored in New Orleans by September 10, but countless businesses throughout southeast Louisiana are still without power.

Current estimates indicate that power will be fully restored in most areas of Louisiana by October 1. While this prediction provides some solace to business owners, the question turns to what happens once power is actually restored. This article will provide tips on what employers should consider doing.

Take Inventory

Perhaps the most important aspect of recovery is assessing the business's needs. Business owners must determine what they need to get operations back online. This may include meeting with key employees and assigning essential tasks not only to gather critical information, but also to set expectations with customers, suppliers, and employees.

Addressing every need before (or while) reopening may be daunting. Begin with a restoration checklist to prioritize business needs. A typical checklist addresses whether the facility is functional or if business can reopen without significant repairs. It also may assess the business's current financial position and steps to ensure short-term viability. A comprehensive checklist will detail all the requirements to reopen the business, from employee safety protocols to state and federal regulations. Ultimately, taking inventory of business needs can help to address critical problems quickly while ensuring little things do not lead to larger issues down the road.

Enable Recovery Teams

Having a core group of employees responsible for specific tasks (or worksites) can be invaluable to bringing a business back after a disaster. The recovery team can be responsible for restoring IT functions, maintaining communications with critical stakeholders, handling payroll and benefits, and coordinating work schedules, among other tasks. The size of the recovery team depends largely upon the size and nature of the business and its immediate needs. Nevertheless, the recovery team should reflect the business's values and commitment to reopening "the right way" (*i.e.*, considering the immediate needs of the business and reopening in a safe, manageable manner).

Balance Employees' Needs With Workplace Policies

Empathetic employers are more likely to have a strong, resilient, and loyal workforce. Because of this, it is critical to give employees the tools and time needed to address their personal affairs after a disaster. A disaster affects everyone, so it is common for employees to need time to deal with insurance adjusters, contractors, lenders, and schools. They also may need time to settle vulnerable loved ones in temporary housing, address their own technology outages, and manage other, immediate financial issues. Employees with their personal lives in order can better focus on their jobs.

Employers can (and should) be flexible around allowing time off, but they must be clear and consistent about workplace policies. Louisiana law does not require employers to provide time off for personal activities (*i.e.*, finding a new home or meeting with insurance adjusters), but employees should give proper notice in requesting time off. Remote work policies should operate in the same manner. Ultimately, employers must be clear about when time off is allowed, when employees are expected to be at work, and how personal time off balances will be managed.

Maintain Clear Communication

Communication is integral to any recovery plan. Customers, clients, and suppliers deserve to know the status of the business, regardless of when it intends to reopen. A recovery team can reach out to these groups as soon as possible to communicate details about the damage to the business, the availability of employees, the need for data retention and recovery, and a reasonable timeline to reopen the business. A

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recovery team also should be responsible for receiving emails, calls, and text messages from employees and other interested parties, as well as for disseminating information about the business. Through clear communication, a business can set proper expectations that will pay dividends throughout the recovery process.

Jackson Lewis attorneys are ready to answer questions on creating and executing business recovery plans.

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