

## Press Release

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For immediate release

### **Employers urged to treat volcano issue with care**

WITH the Icelandic volcano still a pressing issue, employers are being advised to take a 'common sense approach' when it comes to dealing with stranded staff.

According to Bath-based experts, Target HR Consultancy, given that the situation is so unprecedented, employment law alone cannot offer companies a quick fix solution.

"There is a lot of debate over how employers should be dealing with staff absences as a result of this force majeure," Debbie Taylor, director of Target HR Consultancy, explains. "The overriding point for companies to bear in mind is that this is an extreme event and employees cannot be to blame.

"Technically, if a member of staff doesn't turn up for work, employers are not obliged to pay them; however, in this circumstance it is not the employee's fault, so they could have a case for unlawful deduction of wages, depending on the specific circumstances.

"Furthermore, employers cannot force unpaid leave on staff, nor can they force them to take the time off as holiday, as they won't have been able to give their staff the appropriate notice," she adds.

Debbie says that if companies want to achieve the best outcome, they need to talk to their employees.

"Much like the ash cloud, the volcano has thrown up a grey area of employment law," Debbie said. "However, businesses have already experienced huge disruption from swine flu, followed by the chaos caused by the heavy snow falls this winter, so they will be relying on the same methods of flexible working and communication to get them through this situation with minimal disruption.

"The best approach overall is to take a fair and sympathetic approach and treat each case individually. Employers should be in contact with their staff to see if they can work remotely –some may have access to email which means that they could work abroad," she said.



“In other cases, staff may agree to take the time off as extra holiday, or as unpaid leave. Alternatively, as long as it doesn’t cause a massive back log, employers could ask them to make it up when they return to work,” Debbie advises.

“Some employees will often put in extra hours throughout the year anyway, so this should be taken into consideration to maintain goodwill. Many employers have also offered a couple of days grace given the unpredictable nature of what has happened.

“Encouraging flexibility from both parties will ensure the best outcome is achieved. However, given the amount of disruption that employers already have suffered over the past year, it is advisable to revisit or, in some cases, create company policies to ensure there is fair and consistent treatment of everyone unforeseen circumstances,” she adds.

For information and advice on dealing with absent staff or other HR issues, contact Debbie Taylor on 0845 241 3387, visit Target HR Consultancy at [www.target-accountants.com](http://www.target-accountants.com).

## **ENDS**

For media enquiries contact Corrina Cockayne at Target Chartered Accountants on 01225 486348, or e-mail [corrina.cockayne@target-accountants.com](mailto:corrina.cockayne@target-accountants.com).

## **Editor’s notes**

### **Target Chartered Accountants**

Target is a top 40\* firm of chartered accountants working exclusively with entrepreneurial individuals and their businesses around the country. The firm has 14 directors and 180 staff working out of four UK offices in Bath, London, Reading and the Midlands. Established 11 years ago as a specialist tax consultancy, Target are now leading advisers in six core integrated service areas: Audit and Assurance, Business Services, Tax Planning, Corporate Finance, Financial Management and HR Consultancy.

\*(source: Accountancy magazine, 2010)

