



Rapid response to mass layoffs

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Employment Security oversees statewide "rapid response" to mass layoffs

FY2008: rapid-response was deployed for 54 mass layoffs, involving almost 6,000 workers

Assistance is tailored to the workers

The federal Workforce Investment Act of 1998 requires each state to establish a rapid-response team within its Dislocated-Worker Unit. The team quickly assists employers and affected workers following the announcement of a permanent closure, mass layoff, or natural or other disaster that results in a mass job dislocation. Two major events trigger state rapid-response activities:

1. The filing of a notice under the federal Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act (WARN). The WARN notice requires employers to provide notice 60 days in advance of plant closings and mass layoffs for employers over a certain size. This notice must be provided to affected workers or their representatives, local government and the state's Dislocated-Worker Unit (located within the Employment Security Department).
2. The filing of a petition under the federal Trade Adjustment Assistance Reform Act (TAA) of 2002. The filing of a TAA petition requires the state Dislocated-Worker Unit to ensure that rapid-response assistance and appropriate core and intensive services are made available to workers covered by the petition. If the TAA petition is approved, the eligible workers are entitled to additional benefits and training opportunities to help them return to work.

In the July 2007-June 2008 fiscal year, the Employment Security Department's rapid-response team responded to 54 WARN notices affecting nearly 6,000 workers. In the same time period, local workforce development areas received \$4.6 million in assistance to provide additional services to dislocated workers, such as training. In the first three months of the July 2008-June 2009 fiscal year, the number of mass layoffs has increased rapidly, greatly increasing the workload on the rapid-response team.

How rapid response occurs

When a major layoff is announced, the state's rapid-response team quickly establishes communication with the employer and locally based rapid-response partners. After state and local partners determine what initial information is available and assess the immediate needs of the workers and the employer, they establish appropriate "first steps" in responding as a workforce system and form strategies for planning and carrying out initial rapid-response activities.

An initial on-site meeting may be scheduled with the employer, including union officials (if applicable) to gather information and schedule pre-layoff workshops for the dislocated workers. The team obtains the commitment of company management (and the union) to actively participate in planning and implementing key tasks, such as a worker survey, pre-layoff workshops about unemployment and reemployment services, placing staff on-site to deliver transition services, and outreach activities. A transitional or labor-management committee may be formed to help guide the transition process.

Rapid-response partner organizations

- Dislocated-Worker Unit (Employment Security Department).
- Workforce development councils (locally based).
- WorkSource centers.
- Unemployment-insurance program (Employment Security Department).
- Washington State Labor Council and local labor affiliates.
- Reemployment support centers (when applicable), which provide services aimed at addressing emotional, physical, medical and/or financial barriers that keep dislocated workers from finding work.
- Community and technical colleges.

Services to employers and workers

Employers receive confidential assistance with planning transition needs; help in understanding WARN requirements, information about possible alternatives that may help reduce or avoid the current or future layoffs and assistance in conducting an orderly shutdown. Employers are informed about pre-layoff services designed to help workers shorten their transition to employment; given information to help the company maintain worker morale and productivity during the transition; and coordination of services for workers with local WorkSource services.

Workers: Rapid-response team members provide orientation meetings that introduce workers to the services that will be made available to help them get back to work. Services are customized to meet the specific needs of the population being laid off. In addition to discussing training opportunities and employment assistance available through WorkSource, unemployment-insurance information is provided, and mass unemployment applications may be taken. Workers also may receive information about low-cost health insurance from the Washington Basic Health Plan.

Contacts

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