

## How cold is your boss survey: analysis of results

1416 people completed our survey about travelling to work in adverse weather conditions between 1-6 March. This paper details some of the findings. As a self-selected sample it does not claim to be representative.

- 65% were not satisfied with their employer's response.
- 53% were required to travel to work as normal
- 43% were required to travel during a red weather warning.

### Threats of discipline / sacking

"Told to report for duty as normal, regardless of conditions 'or I'll be out'" (Lorry driver)

"Staff were expected to get to work by any means, store manager said he was not 'taking the weather warning as an excuse'" (Supermarket worker)

### Long walks

"Phoned to say I could not move car in snow and no trains to work or buses, was told to phone taxi or walk. I had to walk for 90 minutes there and back home again, this time in the dark on my own, in horrendous conditions, as no taxis would understandably come out" (Supermarket worker)

"Told store was opening as planned, made the effort and walked only to be 2 and half hours with store remaining closed and being sent away again!!!! Same tomorrow even before we know what's happening with transport" (Department store worker)

"As our manager is in walking distance from the store and could be in with relative ease he expected us to also make it in despite every other member of staff living at least twice the distance from the shop as him...as well as one member of staff being pregnant... When informed that some members of staff absolutely could not make it in as transport was off and living too far away to walk to work (2.5miles plus for most staff concerned) replies to messages were short, cold and unconcerned with the well-being of that member of staff" (Barista in large coffee chain)

"Although the red alert was put out urging people to go home immediately we were told to stay for another 2.5 hours regardless of the fact transport was slowing down and about to be turned off completely... they knew this all along....We were closed down hours after the red alert on the wed, Thursday and Friday we were told to travel as normal and after telling them there was no/limited transport .. We all felt that they were putting the business before our personal safety" (Bank worker)

"Expected to be in for 10, walked for 2 hours/4 miles to get in" (Bank worker)

"The managers dithered closing the site so we were out in town during the Amber alert and when I couldn't get a bus I was out until the Red alert hit. It took me two hours to reach home." (Bank worker)

"I had to ... walk to a nearby place of work 1.3 miles away in the blizzard, work the rest of my shift then walk home at 10pm in a blizzard. I was non-essential staff doing paperwork and my boss was at home. And checked that I had attended the other venue to work from" (Worker didn't give employer details)

#### No personal protective equipment

"I am a car valet expected to work outside with unsuitable work wear until normal working finish... we have also been threatened with disciplinary action" (Car dealership worker)

"On Wednesday myself and 3 others were required to drive across Glasgow to a site which we are working on... It took an hour and 40 minutes for what is usually a 20 mins journey. We then got told that would be working in what I can only describe as being a blizzard. Without correct thermal ppe as well. The site then got shut down around 12.30 in the afternoon. I then didn't get home until 3.30pm. The visibility was absolutely atrocious. Even driving a 4x4 I felt unsafe." (Construction engineering company)

"Was not informed of the "red alert", was not asked if I wanted to leave early due to bad weather conditions. I was asked "if I stayed locally" which I replied yes (30min walk) then was told that "you'd be fine", unaware at this point people were allowed to leave early if lived further away. ... I was shocked at the safety of [supermarket name removed] as there were only 3 people in the entire shop after 7pm right up till 9pm. We were also required go outside for 40 mins and retrieve trollies with only high vis jackets (had to use my own hat & gloves to keep warm)." (Supermarket worker)

#### Road / public safety

"Expected to drive articulated truck until 6pm Wednesday then from 10am Thursday covering length of Scotland and northern England... We are appalled at the lack of care shown towards us" (Lorry driver)

"Am completely terrified going to be having to be on the road all day or not have a job" (Courier driver)

"My employer has made it clear that I should come in to work regardless of weather. They have no concern over the risk to my safety and are not being flexible with me, particularly as I have even offered to report for duty in a service within walking distance as opposed to a 14 mile drive. The aforementioned is actually in the adverse weather policy and my employer and line manager has chosen to dismiss this when I made the offer." (Charity worker)

- 22% were required not to work but were not paid in full

"I left at 1pm on the Wednesday at the end of my shift but at that time there were no plans to close early. I did hear that they subsequently did close (probably as the whole centre was closing) I was lucky as Thursday and Friday were my scheduled days off, but from speaking to my colleagues no one was contacted by the store to say if it was open or closed. And if you don't make it in you don't get paid or have to take annual leave or make up the hours (during the same week!)" (Supermarket worker)

"Any staff who couldn't come in lost their pay. Including myself" (Retail outlet worker)

“Management told staff to come in for start of trade (9am), then pushed it back for late shop opening at 11am. Public transport was cancelled and Police Scotland insisted emergency services should only be on the roads. Staff were walking to work, but weren't sure how far was "reasonable" to walk. Those of us too far to walk were told to keep checking public transport updates (buses) hourly. I normally start work at 7am, so had been checking transport since 5am. Eventually, at 11am, management said they would open the shop with the people they had there, but close "early" at 2pm. Today has been completely unacceptable. Management have given us 3 updates. One of these was yesterday afternoon, when they closed the shop early, at 4.30. We were working with minimal staff (bearing in mind, this is a department store). Other shops and offices closed well in advance of this. There was some confusion with who should get to go home early (to catch trains) and many of us left behind thought it was unfair. The other 2 updates from management were at 9 and 11. The shop should never have opened today. In my opinion, it shouldn't open tomorrow either, but we've been told it's to open at 10am (an hour later than usual). We have not yet been told if the time will have to be paid back or taken from pay.”  
(Department store worker)

“Staff had pay deducted for being late, despite being stuck on the motorway for 2 hours. Managers encouraged staff to travel to work or stay at work when a red warning was in place. Staff also had pay deducted for closing early.” (Bookmakers worker)

“Didn't go as the office I work in was closed and I knew that I would have to come home. However [company's name removed] still insisted I must turn up at my post to be paid... I lost a day's wages. (Outsourcing and security services worker)

“Told we would lose a day's pay if we didn't come to work. Even though I am a train driver and all trains were cancelled for the whole day.” (Train driver)

- 19% were required not to work but take annual leave, flexitime or TOIL

“We have been told if we do not go in they will take holidays from us” (Office worker)

“I didn't go to [workplace removed] and now I'm scared that they are not gonna give me more hours in revenge. I have only 10 hours contract and I need more to live, to pay bills and eat something.” (Supermarket worker)

“I phoned in at 4am to inform store I couldn't get out and roads were horrendous. Was told that was OK and I would be marked as authorised absence. Have been informed of the same for the next day too as snow still falling heavily” (Supermarket worker)

“I have been snowed in for three days in the village of Forth all roads have been blocked and I have contacted my manager to inform them of situation I have been told I lose a day holiday or pay for the days I was unable to work.” (Council run Leisure Centre worker)

“[The] Council made cleaners, janitors and catering staff go in to schools while teachers, pupil helpers and office workers were told to stay in their houses” (Council worker)

“[Was] required to use annual leave/flexi - cleaning schools which are empty should not be seen as an essential task, the lack of communication and risk assessing has been disgusting” (Schools and facilities worker)

“Schools closed to all teaching staff and pupils but cleaners and kitchen staff were told to report to work as normal or wouldn't be paid. Are we not just as important, is this not discrimination?” (Council worker)

*There were also various stories of arms-length external organisation staff being told they would have to take annual leave if not travelling to work.*

*There were of course some good examples. One retail worker said they did not have to travel to work but were paid in full.*

- 69% of those who said they had caring responsibilities said their employer did not take any account of changing caring responsibilities as a result of the weather

“Advised my manager it wasn't safe to push buggy almost 3 miles in snow as it was deep snow and blizzards was told I'm walking distance but I couldn't get my child to my mother to be cared for while I worked so I stayed at home 1st day. I have a lung condition (pulmonary Fibrosis) I had to walk 1.5 miles to get to work in freezing snowy conditions as I'm walking distance!” (Council worker)

“I didn't go in as nursery was shut so I had no childcare. Even if nursery had been open it wasn't safe to be walking over a mile with a 1 year old in a blizzard. I don't know if I have to take holidays or will be disciplined for not going in. No clear guidance was given.” (Worker didn't give employer details)

- 89% said these issues affected colleagues
- 68% said they had discussed these issues with colleagues

“We have spoken over the phone regarding how we are treated and that safety for workers is not in the slightest bit of interest to them” (Framing supplies company)

“[We have] a social media group chat. Many of us have conflicting stories from management, some allowed to stay home during the bad weather, others encouraged to come in. Also we are all aware of some dubious workforce management issues going on” (Worker didn't give employer details)

“We discussed the situation on Wednesday as we were all concerned about getting home. While the managers were having meetings to discuss the weather some people decided enough was enough and left en mass to make their way home, while the rest waited on the official word that we could go, which came 30 minutes later.” (Bank worker)

- 36% said their employer had an adverse weather policy; 24% said they did not; and 40% said they didn't know.
- 40% said they had a trade union rep they could speak to about health and safety concerns; 28% said they didn't have anyone they could speak to about health and safety other than their boss; 21% said they didn't know; 6% said a staff association rep; and 6% said other.

“For the first time I can remember they shut the offices by 1pm - although I had heard they planned to stay open until 3pm, must have been the PCS rep's advances to them that made them see sense” (UK civil servant)

“I am a contractor in this job and do not know if I have access to the same resources as permanent colleagues” (Bank worker)

“Not allowed trade unions” (Car tyre company)

### **Relationships between Trade Unions and employer response satisfaction**

Those that said they had a trade union representative to speak to were more likely to be satisfied by their employer’s response. 45% of those that had a Union rep to speak to about health and safety concerns were satisfied by their employer’s response, as opposed to 18% for those that didn’t; and 31% for those that didn’t know. This suggests increasing trade union membership and collective bargaining is an important factor in determining how employees feel about employer behaviour in difficult conditions.

### **Implications**

- There is a lack of clarity about essential services. While the Scottish Government’s communications about only travelling for essential purposes was welcome, too many workers think that their work is essential, or are told by their employer that their work is essential. The Scottish Government should provide more specific guidance on what is and isn’t an essential service in adverse weather conditions.
- Alongside large multinationals, a number of respondents working for Councils, the NHS and other public bodies reported serious issues. This seems to particularly be the case for ‘non-direct’ staff, such as cleaning, catering, and support staff. This suggests a disjoint between what different levels of Government are saying publicly and what is happening in practice.
- There is a lack of knowledge about worker’s rights in relation to time-off for childcare, being paid and having to take annual leave. Given that those who had a trade union rep were more likely to be satisfied with their employer’s behaviour, more needs to be done to make workers aware of their rights to fair work and the importance of joining a trade union.

For more information contact: Francis Stuart, STUC Policy Officer, [fstuart@stuc.org.uk](mailto:fstuart@stuc.org.uk)