



AXA UNION NEWSLETTER

February 2009

AXA Snowballs-Up

Unite are shocked and disappointed at the response of some AXA managers (mostly in AXA Life) to the recent severe weather and its impact on employees. In many cases it appears that employees have been incorrectly instructed to use their holiday or flexitime in breach of the agreed AXA policy, or even had a day automatically taken from them.

The employee handbook on the Intranet (branded as My Handbook@AXA) clearly states that "If a major event occurs affecting your travel to work, you need to make all reasonable efforts to get to work via another route or method. Alternatives may include travelling to a different AXA office or using alternative methods of travelling. If it is agreed that you have made all reasonable efforts to find alternative methods of getting to work, you will not be unfairly penalised."

The policy further clarifies that "Severe weather would have to have a substantial effect on normal activities to apply under this policy. This substantial effect might be on your ability to use your normal traffic route or public transport, or on driving safely."

Everyone will be aware that we have experienced some exceptionally bad weather including significant snowfalls. For example in the Bristol area on Friday 6 February 2009 Avon and Somerset police issued warnings urging motorists not to drive in the hazardous conditions. A police spokesman stated "The best advice we can give drivers at the moment is to not go out at all, unless it's an emergency". Public transport was also cancelled as First withdrew all bus services in Bristol for the second day in a row. First said that roads across the city were too dangerous for private car use, let alone for public transport.

This situation was discussed with AXA HR and it was confirmed that where it was not reasonable to expect an employee to make it into the office due to the severe weather, they would not be expected to make the time up.



However members (particularly in AXA Life) have continued to contact Unite advising that although it was impossible for them to get to the office, their manager insists they must take holiday or make up the time. As an employer AXA has a duty of care to its employees and Unite are concerned that as well as breaching the policy, this approach may lead employees to put themselves and their property at unnecessary risk trying to get into the office in unsafe conditions.

There is a further issue in respect of employees that experienced excessive journey times to and from the office due to the severe weather also being expected to make up hours. Again, the policy applies that they should not be unfairly penalised for struggling into work.

Another policy that may apply is that of 'Time off for emergencies involving dependants'. The most obvious example being where a school is closed and parents are left with no alternative child care arrangements.

We have been assured that the correct position regarding these policies will now be communicated by AXA. If there are any cases where this matter is not brought to a satisfactory conclusion you should contact your local Unite representative with full details.