

Kan Culture.

**Cyclone
Preparedness
& Response
Plan**



March 2025

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Introduction

Supporting Local Businesses in Making the Right Decisions for Their Teams and Operations



As Cyclone Alfred approaches, ensuring the safety of your employees, customers, and operations is the top priority. Small businesses, particularly those with field staff or customer-facing teams, need to make timely and informed decisions to protect their people while balancing business continuity.

This Guide provides clear steps to help you

- Decide when to close or modify operations
- Understand your legal obligations and discretionary choices
- Ensure employee safety and support workplace communication
- Access financial and government support if needed
- The following structured approach will help you navigate this weather event with confidence.

Prioritising Safety

When Should You Close or Modify Operations?



The decision to close or modify work arrangements should be based on:

Official weather warnings and emergency alerts

- These are issued by the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) and local emergency services to warn about severe weather conditions, including cyclones, heavy rainfall, and strong winds.
- Warnings may include cyclone tracking updates, evacuation orders, flood warnings, and severe storm alerts.
- Businesses should monitor these alerts and follow official advice regarding closures, evacuations, and safety measures.

Workplace safety risks (e.g., flooding, road closures, public transport disruptions)

- Some workplaces may become unsafe due to flooding, power outages, high winds, or structural damage.
- Employees may struggle to reach work safely if roads are blocked, transport is disrupted, or flooding occurs.
- Employers must assess these risks and determine whether work should continue or if alternative arrangements are needed.

Employee safety during travel to and from work

- If roads are flooded, public transport is shut down, or winds make travel dangerous, employees may be at risk when commuting.
- Businesses should consider allowing early departures, flexible working arrangements, or remote work if safe travel cannot be guaranteed.
- If conditions are expected to worsen later in the day, it may be safer to close early rather than wait until conditions deteriorate.

Business Viability (Customer Demand, Supply Chain Disruptions, Operational Feasibility)

- If severe weather prevents customers from visiting, it may not be financially viable to remain open.
- Supply chains may be disrupted if deliveries are delayed due to road closures or supplier shutdowns.
- If a business cannot operate effectively due to staff shortages, power outages, or infrastructure damage, it may be best to temporarily close and focus on recovery planning.

Each of these factors should be evaluated together to make informed decisions about workplace closures, modifications to operations, and employee safety



Indoor/Retail-Based Businesses: Closure & Operational Adjustments

When to Close or Reduce Hours

Mandatory Closure: If authorities issue an evacuation order or declare a disaster area, the business must close.

Public Transport Disruptions: If buses, trains, or ferries are suspended or unreliable, businesses should consider early closure to allow staff to get home safely.

Severe Weather Warnings: If high winds or flooding prevent customers from reaching your business, it may be best to close temporarily or reduce hours.

Employee Safety Concerns: If staff feel unsafe traveling, employers should be flexible in approving annual leave, unpaid leave, or remote work options (if feasible).

Best Practices for Retail & Office-Based Businesses

- Plan early closures rather than last-minute shutdowns.
- Use team messages (SMS, WhatsApp, email) to keep employees informed.
- If closing early, communicate with suppliers and customers about changes in hours.
- Have a contingency plan for reopening once conditions improve.



Outdoor & Field-Based Businesses: When to Cease Work

Work Must Stop When:

- **Severe Weather Warnings:** Severe weather conditions (strong winds, flooding, heavy rain) make the site unsafe.
- **Travel:** Travel routes to or from work are hazardous or public transport is unavailable.
- **Unsafe work environment:** On-site conditions (e.g., falling debris, unstable ground, power outages) pose a risk to employees.

Best Practices for Outdoor & Field-Based Businesses

- Assign a safety officer or manager to monitor conditions and make the call early.
- If conditions are likely to worsen later in the day, cancel work before employees leave home.
- Provide employees with a clear emergency plan, including evacuation routes and check-in procedures.
- Where possible, reassign outdoor workers to indoor tasks or suspend work until it is safe to continue.



Employer Responsibilities: What Are Your Legal Obligations?

Stand-Down Provisions (Fair Work Act 2009)

- Employers can legally stand down employees without pay if work stops due to circumstances beyond their control (such as a cyclone) and they cannot be reasonably employed elsewhere.
- If the business chooses to close voluntarily before a mandated shutdown, employers must honour normal pay obligations unless stand-down provisions apply.
- Employees may request to take annual leave during stand-down periods.

Leave Entitlements for Employees

- Employees can take paid sick or carers leave if unwell or caring for a family member affected by the cyclone.
- If paid sick or carer's leave is exhausted, employees are entitled to two days of unpaid carer's leave per occasion.

When extreme weather conditions like Cyclone Alfred approach, deciding when to close your business is a balance between legal obligations, employee safety, and business continuity. Here's a breakdown of what's required, what's discretionary, and how to make the best decision for your business.

Factor	Legal Requirement	Employer Discretion
Workplace Health & Safety (WHS) Obligations	Employers must ensure a safe working environment. If conditions become unsafe, work must stop.	Employers may choose to close before conditions become legally unsafe as a precaution.
Stand-Down Provisions (Fair Work Act 2009)	Employers can stand down employees without pay if work is halted due to extreme weather and they cannot be reasonably employed elsewhere.	Employers may choose to pay employees during closure or allow annual leave use.
Direction to Stop Work	If the government issues a mandatory evacuation or emergency directive, businesses must comply.	Businesses can decide to close before an official directive if they believe safety is at risk.
Employee Rights	Employees cannot be forced to work in unsafe conditions.	Employees may request leave or refuse work if they believe conditions are unsafe.

Clear & Timely Communication Prevents Confusion

Employees need early updates about closures, work status, and any changes to their hours or pay.

Best Practices for Communication:

- Notify employees as early as possible about closures, work modifications, or changes to schedules.
- Use SMS, WhatsApp, email, or workplace apps to provide real-time updates.
- If standing down employees, provide written confirmation outlining:
 - The start date of the stand-down.
 - Whether it is paid or unpaid.
 - Any changes to entitlements or return-to-work expectations.

Helpful Tip: Assign a point of contact (manager or HR representative) for employees to ask questions.

Government & Financial Support for Employees & Businesses

If employees are stood down without pay, they may be eligible for financial assistance through Centrelink or Services Australia disaster relief payments.

Business Support:

- The Queensland Government and the Small Business Disaster Hub may release grants, low-interest loans, or relief packages following the cyclone.
- Keep an eye on Services Australia's Disaster Assistance page for the latest financial aid options.

Resources:

- QLD Disaster Recovery Hub: <https://www.business.qld.gov.au>
- Services Australia Disaster Payments: <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au>

Key steps to take right now



1. Assess Risk Levels by Industry

Indoor/retail vs. outdoor/field-based work.



2. Decide on closure policy

Will you wait for official direction, or will you set a threshold (e.g., wind speeds, flooding levels) for closure?



3. Communicate with employees

Provide clear guidance on how closure decisions will be made and when they will be announced.



4. Prepare for recovery

Consider plans for reopening, rescheduling work, and supporting affected employees.



Safety first. When in doubt, err on the side of caution—it's better to close early than to risk the safety of employees and customers. If you need help making a plan or understanding your legal obligations, feel free to reach out.



Contact Us

Let's work together to protect our businesses, our employees, and our community. Stay safe, and please don't hesitate to connect if you need support.

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