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Do storm-stranded workers qualify for unemployment benefits?

OLYMPIA – Workers who lost pay because their employer closed due to the December snow storms potentially qualify for unemployment benefits, according to officials at the Washington State Employment Security Department.

However, unless the business was closed for more than a week, these employees would not receive an unemployment check, since benefits are not paid for the first week that a person becomes unemployed.

Employees who lost pay because they could not get to work, while their employer remained open, are not eligible for unemployment benefits.

To apply for benefits for past weeks, workers must apply by phone at 800-318-6022 and request that their application be backdated. Unfortunately, the online application system, at www.esd.wa.gov, cannot handle backdated claims.

Because of high call volumes, callers may experience a long wait before speaking to a claims agent. Wednesdays and Thursdays typically have the shortest waiting periods. The office will be closed on Jan. 1 for New Year's Day.

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