# Majority of workers forced outdoors during Storm Eowyn despite red weather warning



A recent survey conducted by Unite the Union has revealed that during the passage of Storm Eowyn in Northern Ireland, a majority of workers were still expected to report for outdoor duties despite severe weather warnings being in place. The survey results indicated that 59% of respondents were required to attend work outside even as a red weather warning was issued.

These findings prompt renewed attention to worker safety during extreme weather events. Since the tragic death of union member Matthew Campbell in 2018—who was fatally injured by a falling tree while working during Storm Ali—Unite has engaged in multiple discussions with various Stormont departments to advocate for better protections for workers in adverse weather conditions.

Caoimhe Archibald, the Economy Minister, has responded to these concerns by pledging to convene a ‘round table’ meeting aimed at addressing workplace safety amid extreme weather.

Despite the risks, the survey found that only 23% of workers felt safe during Storm Eowyn, while 66% believed that their employers had not taken all reasonable safety precautions. Among those workers whose employers did not mandate attendance on the storm day, more than half were forced to utilise annual leave, unpaid leave, flexitime, sick leave, time-off-in-lieu, or holiday entitlement to cover their absence.

Sharon Graham, Unite’s general secretary, highlighted these issues in a statement to the Irish News, saying: “Our survey exposes that many workers felt unsafe working and travelling during Storm Eowyn, while some employers even attempted to shift the financial cost of closure onto workers by insisting they take a day’s leave. On International Workers’ Memorial Day, we are demanding that the government climate-proof health and safety laws to ensure that workers’ lives and incomes are protected during extreme weather.”

In addition to pressing for improved health and safety regulations, Unite is proposing the introduction of a statutory maximum working temperature to safeguard employees against heat-related risks. The union is also seeking discussions with Enterprise Minister Peter Burke in the Republic of Ireland regarding these proposals.

Among their additional proposals is the establishment of four days’ paid “climate leave” for workers unable to safely commute or who must manage urgent domestic situations caused by extreme weather events. These measures are part of a broader effort to adapt workplace practices and legislation to the realities of climate change and its impact on worker safety and welfare.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://unitetheunionireland.org/2025/01/26/storm-eowyn-construction-employers-try-to-cheat-workers-out-of-days-leave/> - This page corroborates the claim that during Storm Eowyn, some employers forced workers to take unpaid leave despite severe weather conditions, supporting the article's points about employers shifting financial costs onto workers and the union's demand for extreme weather legislation.
2. <https://www.ireland-live.ie/news/ireland/1788297/union-proposes-maximum-working-temperature-and-four-days-of-climate-leave.html> - This article supports the union's proposal for introducing a statutory maximum working temperature and four days of paid climate leave in response to extreme weather, as well as Sharon Graham's statement on worker safety during Storm Eowyn.
3. <https://www.uniteinlbg.org/post/storm-%C3%A9owyn-unite-update> - This update from Unite emphasizes safety advice during Storm Eowyn and reflects the union's position on protecting workers amid a 'danger to life' warning, supporting the article's overall theme of worker safety concerns during extreme weather.
4. <https://www.siliconrepublic.com/innovation/storm-eowyn-galway-research-storm-tide> - This research article details the severity of Storm Eowyn, including record-breaking gusts and flooding, providing context about the extreme weather conditions referenced in the survey and safety concerns presented in the article.
5. <https://www.deadlinenews.co.uk/2025/01/24/hospitality-union-issues-offer-of-support-for-staff-forced-to-come-to-work-amidst-red-weather-warning/> - This source documents Unite's support for hospitality workers forced to work during the red weather warning for Storm Eowyn, corroborating the claim that workers were still expected to attend work despite severe weather warnings.
6. <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/unite-raises-concerns-over-worker-safety-during-extreme-weather-events-40375437.html> - This Belfast Telegraph report covers Unite's advocacy for better worker safety after extreme weather incidents including Storm Eowyn, and references discussions with Stormont officials like Economy Minister Caoimhe Archibald about convening round-tables on workplace safety.
7. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/more-than-half-of-outdoor-workers-expected-to-turn-up-during-storm-eowyn-B55LGB3KS5ES3H7TF5MAOFIG3E/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data