

What can I do?

Firm's rumored closure a concern

Dear Amanda:
I'm panic-stricken! For some months, there have been rumors that my employer is planning on closing down operations in Ontario.

At first, I wrote them off as gossip. Perhaps it was wishful thinking. Recently, things have been happening that make me think there's some truth to the rumors. A committee of employees has approached management but all we got is a lot of vague statements and a promise that an announcement will be made "at the proper time."

I started working for this company right after graduation and I've been here 21 years. I have a family, a mortgage, commitments. My wife hasn't slept for two weeks and is urging me to "Do something!" I don't know what.

What are my rights here? What kind of notice do they have to give

Work Watch

Amanda Day

me? Am I automatically entitled to severance pay? And what should I be doing?

Dear Panic-stricken:
I agree that a promise of an announcement pending sounds ominous. You're right to gather facts and do some planning in case the worst happens. But don't jump to conclusions.

Any employee who has been employed for 10 years or more is entitled to eight weeks notice of termination.

If your employer doesn't give you the required notice, he must pay in lieu of notice and maintain

your fringe benefits for the notice period. You should also receive any vacation pay to which you are entitled.

Severance pay is payable where 50 or more employees are terminated in six months or less due to a permanent closing of all or part of a business.

Employees with five or more years of employment are entitled to one week's pay for each year of employment to a maximum of 26 weeks pay.

This is an addition to any right you have to notice of termination or pay in lieu of notice.

Obviously, you're going to have some lead time and some financial backing to cushion the blow and allow you to look for another job. It makes sense to start putting out feelers as soon as possible.

Some steps you can take right now are:

Start checking newspaper ads to find out where the vacancies are in your line of work. Knowing the market and current pay rates (your company may or may not be typical) will be important.

Ensure that your skills are up-to-date. Does your present company use the latest equipment and technology? If not, contact your nearest community college for advice on updating your skills to ensure your competitiveness.

Tell any discreet friends and relatives in related businesses that you may be on the market

shortly. Never underestimate personal contacts as a source of job leads.

Put together a resume and pass it along to government and private agencies in the job finding business.

Usually, when a company closes down a number of experts from both the public and private sector are brought in to ease the employees' transition to other work. Make use of them.

It's frightening to anticipate a job change after 21 years. But you'll have plenty of support, and, if you start taking steps right now, you'll be ahead of the game.

That's my advice. I hope you don't have to use it.

Anyone with work-related questions is welcome to write to Amanda Day at the Weekender, 9 Heritage Rd. Markham L3P-1M3. Ms. Day has years of training in the employment counselling field. You needn't identify yourself.

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