

LAYOFFS BOTCHED IN NEW MEXICO



Usually when people get laid off they find out that they are without a paycheck. This is not the case for six workers in Bernalillo County, New Mexico who are currently being paid to stay at home thanks to a botched layoff attempt by a county official. The problem began when the Bernalillo County Assessors Office attempted to lay off the county workers without following the proper procedures. The real snafu is that the county assessor attempted to lay off the six workers without getting the proper approval from the county manager. This step is essential in the process of layoffs in Bernalillo County. So, at the current moment the employees are not officially laid off, but they are not in their current positions either. Basically, at these workers are being paid their base salary by Bernalillo County to stay at home and do nothing at all. While it would be an understatement to say that the situation could have been handled better than it was, by simply following the proper procedure for a layoff in the county, like many layoffs in the nation this all began with a pink slip. Karen Montoya, the County Assessor for Bernalillo County, issued the pink slips to the workers with a 30-day notice period. The notice would have made the last day of the workers in question November 30th. While Montoya did also give some general information to Tom Zdunek, the County Manager, about the layoff plan including when the notices would be given out, she failed to mention some important details about the layoffs. She failed to tell the county manager about which specific positions the county, or which specific workers, the county would be letting go. Because of these omissions the County Manager says that the layoffs were never approved by his office. This however, was not the only slipup that Montoya made. In addition to letting go the staff without the proper authority to do so, she gave the workers an administrative leave. For those of you unfamiliar with the term, an administrative leave is basically a paid vacation for the workers who were getting ready to lose their jobs. In a nutshell Montoya told the 13 laid off workers to get out of the office as soon as the layoff notices were issued, with pay, until the official layoff date. The rub here is that Montoya did not have the authority to grant workers an administrative leave. When she was asked why she chose this course of action by a local reporter she said that she thought it was best for the department. Her exact words were, "Meanwhile we have disgruntled employees that could possibly sabotage records, we have bad morale, work slowed down and therefore I took it upon myself enough was enough." Sadly her attempt to take decisive action outside of her actually scope of authority created a much larger mess that had to be corrected by the county manager. While several of the employees were offered the chance to come back many of them refused and are still being paid until the end of the month.

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