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### Layoff Lowdown

#### Panel Comes To Grips With Slump Casualties

By [Kate Prahlad](#)

**HARRISONBURG** - Businesses face much more than just slimmer profits in a tightening economy.

With a smaller bottom line come potential layoffs, and with that can come lawsuits, unemployment claims and the need to help those laid off back into the job market.

At a panel hosted Wednesday by the National Federation of Independent Businesses and the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Chamber of Commerce, local employment experts outlined some of the effects on employers from a slowing economy.

"One piece of a slumping economy is layoffs, or position eliminations," said Cathleen Welsh, an employment attorney with Lenhart Obenshain. "[After layoffs,] there are many people who are unhappy and who are looking for a remedy to the situation. They are looking to blame others when there may not be any blame."

Therefore, she said, employers should protect themselves beforehand, just in case. That preparation should include, for example, extensive documentation of performance evaluations and time records and an objective way to eliminate positions, she said.

In addition to documentation, Welsh said, "communication is key."

#### Area Trends

The Harrisonburg metropolitan area's jobless rate was 4.3 percent in July, up from June's rate of 4 percent, according to a report released Wednesday by the Virginia Employment Commission.

Along with unemployment rates rising in the Harrisonburg area, the amount of unemployment insurance paid out has also risen substantially, said Dana Armentrout, with the VEC.

In June 2008, employers paid out \$410,566 in unemployment insurance in Harrisonburg. In July 2008, that amount totaled \$500,502. Last July, businesses paid \$313,062.

It's also taking longer for unemployed people to get back into jobs, something that occurs in a slowing economy, Armentrout said.

#### A Harsh Environment

A lagging economy can also take its toll on employees, who are paying more for necessities but earning the same, or a smaller, paycheck.

That can cause stress between employees and supervisors, who must be properly trained to handle conflict-management issues, said Mary Sullivan, with Blue Ridge Community College.

Financial troubles at the company also can translate into strained relations at the workplace, Welsh said.

"When you are in the red and not in the black, sometimes your employees are not getting along," Welsh said.

Job losses, at times, may lead to workplace violence, and Welsh emphasized that employers should have policies and plans in place for reactions to layoffs.

#### The Next Step

While terminating employees is a difficult decision, there are ways to ease their transition back into the job market, Sullivan said.

The VEC has a "rapid response" team that comes to places with larger layoffs to help employees deal with the situation.

"We can instruct personnel on services to help them make transitions," said David Silcox, with the VEC. "It eases their transition to unemployment status."

The team can also hold resumé, job-hunting or interview classes.

"A lot of these people have had the same job for 15 years," he said. "When you come out, you don't know how to get a job. You don't know how to market yourself."

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#### 1. RE: Layoff Lowdown

August 28, 2008 2:23 PM

While this is like "wordiness" in a long novel that awaits the end, we've seen the patterns, the symbols, the inferences and the tones to already know this. Please tell us something that we do not know! For example, the I've League's of the nations denied "this state" until we "found" it. Now they and those who wish to play "tag" echo the same words. I predicted in 2005 that the housing would

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crumple. I also predicted that we would face a dimple-depression last year (see News Leader threads), and I predict NOW that YOU buy can goods because within a year--the climax hits. What's wrong?

The Ive Leagues Colleges which push us their elite who now run our country cannot and have not been told how "to think" deductively--and combine that with cronyism and when disasters hits--it's already hit, and everything becomes reaction rather than proactive.

With computers, sociologists and staticians--the trend was there and I saw it. Why didn't our leaders? --Censorship?

--all over the U.S. our standards have fallen in that we have become permissable parents to the world and to ourselves. Not all is permissable and how often do we say, "No!"

Say "No!" to your children, to your city council members, to your delegates, to your school officials, to your senators, to your legislatures, to the lawyers (that run our gov't branches), and say "No!" to ourselves for not saying "No!"

zarxo  
Staunton

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