

## NEW HR Product Update for 2010 from Bent Ericksen & Associates!

You've counted on us over the years to be your resource for state-of-the-art HR & personnel compliance products and services. **Well, the future is brighter than ever and our latest version, our "20-10" release, will be available beginning in March 2010 and promises to be the best yet!**

Clients that have been with Bent Ericksen & Associates over the years will remember what our product used to be like. Prior to the most recent release of the 12<sup>th</sup> Edition, our manual was written based on federal regulations with special footers and notations in certain places throughout the manual indicating a possible state-based deviation from federal law.

Our 12<sup>th</sup> edition, an innovation in the HR industry, changed all that and moved in the direction of **state-based policy manuals**. You no longer had to have policies in place that were not applicable to you. You no longer had to seek out the answers to how your state laws varied – it was all right there, compiled together from a technologically advanced computer program.

### Here Comes The "20-10" HR Director

**Move over CD-Rom – you've been replaced!** This is the 21<sup>st</sup> century and CD's are "so yesterday." Now more than ever, the shift is to web-based programs, which is how our new product will work as well.

If you're one of the few that have felt constrained by the inability to move your product from one computer to another, or view your product from any computer, any where, this new change will delight you. A web-based program will allow you to view your product, even your *personalized* product, from any computer, anytime, and in any location as long as you have access to the internet.

**Mac users – one's for you!** Nothing has proved more frustrating for some than the inability to get the 12<sup>th</sup> edition to work on Mac computers. This will not be a problem with the 20-10 release! Our new product does not require the use of a particular PC because, as previously mentioned, we've gone web-based and no software installation is required.

This also covers those who do not have or use MS Word. All that is needed for our newest product to work is a computer and internet access and -- if you want to print anything – a printer. This is simplicity at its finest and should clear up the problems, issues, and difficulties some users had with the 12<sup>th</sup> edition software and computer compatibility.

**ID and Password Access.** Due to the web-based, online platform of the 20-10 version, each client will have a unique ID and password. Once logged in, clients can review, print, and modify policies or procedures as necessary. There will be levels of password security which will vary access for staff versus employer or manager.

**Among the other highlights:**

**Most policies (over 70!) will be modifiable.** The ability to modify policies is driven by federal or state laws. If a policy is written for the purpose of adhering to certain laws on either a federal or state level, it will not be modifiable at any point in the process. If you've been working with the 12<sup>th</sup> edition product, this is nothing new, of course.

What has changed is the ability to change policies throughout the policy manual that are not mandated by state or federal law. Previously, only the Employee Benefits section contained on the 12<sup>th</sup> edition CD-Rom had policies that were modifiable and the General Policies section was provided in hard-copy format only. This is no longer true. We have freed up most of the policies found in the General Policies section for employers to edit or delete at his/her discretion.

**Adding policies is easier.** While our policy manual is extremely comprehensive, we recognize that there may be additional unique policies you need. Built into the new 20-10 release is the ability for employers to add unique policies of their own. The added policies will be fully incorporated into the document, keeping the formatting and style of the policy manual intact. It will be a seamless addition to the overall manual and ensure you cover all the important aspects of your business policies.

**Keeping up with the times – new policies created.** As always, all of the policies currently in the policy manual have been reviewed and modified, as necessary. Here are some newly added policies that are applicable to everyone:

- **Social Networking:** Use of Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter has become increasingly popular. Employees are using these sites in their off time and may even be accessing them with business equipment. Employers have the right to control employee's participation on these websites to off-time only as well establish some parameters for use. This policy lays a foundation for employers to monitor, control, and discipline employees if necessary.
- **Portable Music Devices:** Listening to iPods or MP3 players has become a regular pastime for many people. So much so, employees are bringing them to work and may be listening to them at inappropriate times or bothering others with a loud volume. This policy will establish guidelines for use and create the ability for employers to enforce the rules consistently with every employee.
- **Leave Related to Domestic Violence:** A growing employment law trend is state-based regulations mandating that employers provide job-protected leave to employees who have been a victim or have family members who have been a victim of domestic violence, stalking or sexual abuse. Most states set very specific rules for how much leave is available and which circumstances qualify for leave. In all cases, the employees are protected from discrimination or retaliation for availing themselves of this right.

Since our manual is uniquely state-based there are some new policies that have been added for applicable states, plus the District of Columbia. These include:

- **D.C. Paid sick leave:** According to the new law issued in D.C., all employers are required to provide all employees with annual paid sick leave. The total number of hours mandated depend on the size of the employer.

- **Colorado & Nevada Leave for School Activities:** Depending on the size of the employer, both states now have laws mandating unpaid, job-protected leave for employees with children who need to attend school events, meetings, or activities.
- **Maryland Flexible Leave:** This new law requires employers who offer paid time off of any kind (sick leave, vacation, PTO) to allow employees to use any combination of that paid time off for illnesses of a child, parent, or spouse of the employee under the same conditions and policy rules that apply if the employee took leave for the employee's own illness.
- **Pennsylvania Healthcare Continuation:** All employers who have 20+ employees must provide the federal healthcare continuation coverage (i.e. COBRA) to employees whose health insurance would otherwise end as a result of some qualifying event. In many states, but not all, employers with fewer than 20 employees must provide state-mandated healthcare continuation coverage under similar circumstances. Pennsylvania is now one of those states and a new policy has been issued ensuring employer compliance.
- **Paid Family Leave Insurance:** Both California and New Jersey have enacted a statewide insurance program for employees who take a leave of absence. With this insurance, employees are not entitled to leave, they are only paid for their time off while on leave if one has been authorized by their employer and it qualifies under the insurance program. This is an employee-funded program through payroll taxes.
- **Reporting Time Pay:** This policy is not a new policy per se. A version of this policy has been in the policy manual previously. What's changed is that it has now been specifically written to state regulations where it is applicable. Thus, if your state does not have a reporting time pay requirement, it will not be in the policy manual at all.

**Keeping up-to-date has been streamlined.** Our newest product will also be easier than ever to update on a regular and ongoing basis. Gone are the days of waiting a few years before an update is issued. With the internet as our source of information, we can update the product without sending you anything other than an email informing you of the change. By the push of a button, everyone will have the latest update that will be easily incorporated into your current product. Your personalized data will not be lost in this update, so you can print the newest policy manual immediately and it will contain your personalized information as well as the update or change. No more time consuming task of integrating the old product with the new!

## **Conclusion**

We're proud of our latest product edition. We believe it to be the best we've offered yet. We're sure you will find this newest version easier to use and much more comprehensive than ever before. As always, we look forward to continuing our path to excellence with our products and services, and supporting your transition to the amazing 20-10 release.