

Disaster Planning for your Business Before a Crisis Hits

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While we may not be able to prevent a disaster, effective contingency planning will help speed recovery, address safety issues and decrease recovery costs. The issues addressed below are applicable to all businesses but are especially tailored to Sonoma Valley businesses where 60% of jobs are in businesses with less 5 employees¹ and there is cultural diversity. All businesses should have workable, written recovery plans in place and available because business owners will not have time or resources to draft thorough plans during a disaster. In addition, it is critical that plans are tested regularly so businesses know they work.

People Safety First

Are you safe? Are the people who work for you safe? Are the families safe? Are you able to communicate with your employees in a language they can understand? In responding to a crisis, it is critical to first assess people safety. Once that is assured, you can activate the rest of your business recovery plan.

1. Create a call tree with phone numbers and alternative numbers of everyone in your business, key vendors and customers. Keep it current by updating at least annually. Be culturally sensitive; if there are language differences, note that on the call tree, so your employees can get critical information they understand.
2. Decide which people will call to check on people safety and provide information on business opening, closing or relocation.
3. Have a business answering machine available to provide basic information to employees, customers and vendors.
4. Designate someone or a team to address staff safety issues.
5. Assign one person as a central point of contact to talk to the press, the community, customers and vendors.
6. Have some financial resources easily available to take care of immediate people and business needs.

Records

Access to records is critical to business recovery and can really speed up recovery time.

1. Data should be backed up regularly and the backup kept offsite in a retrievable manner.
2. Critical papers (like taxes and receipts) should be kept in fireproof boxes or cabinets off the ground.
3. Make a list of your business contacts and phone numbers and store a copy at your business and at least one copy off site.

Processes

Not all business processes are critical for immediate recovery.

1. Make a list of your most important business processes and identify a worse case timeline for recovery.
2. Which processes need to be recovered soonest? Provide more detailed contingency plans for recovery of these processes.

¹ -Data from 2004 Economic Development info for General Plan Update; Visitors Bureau

3. Can these processes be performed at different sites like at home or out of the area?
4. Is there a way these processes can be done manually, if needed?
5. Which require communication with other businesses or entities? If rapid communication is needed, include critical contact numbers and addresses in your plan.
6. Decide on a place for a central command center and an alternative site.
7. Write a basic recovery plan and an alternative plan.

Insurance

Good planning may not decrease the need for business insurance. Talk to your insurance agent about what is recommended for your type of business. However, be prepared to run your business short term without the benefit of insurance or FEMA funds.

Facilities

Knowing your facility enhances your ability to recover quickly and prevent additional damage from occurring once the initial event has passed. This includes:

1. Your building(s) location and the surrounding area
2. Electrical and gas points of entry and isolation
3. Determine if you have a critical need for emergency power.
4. Water supply, cutoffs, and sewer outlets
5. Fire alarms, emergency exits and sprinkler systems
6. Voice and internet communications
7. Transportation systems, both public and private
8. Access to and from your facility
9. Security (both site and personnel security)

Testing

All recovery plans should be written and tested at least annually as if there is an emergency. As you test your recovery plan, you will see that not everything works as intended. Testing gives you the opportunity to adjust your plan so it more effectively addresses your recovery issues and enable your employees to be safer, your business to recover sooner and your recovery costs to be less.

Businesses that are adequately prepared for disasters such as earthquakes or flooding may still suffer losses but will be more able to recover and continue providing services and products to their customers. For more information or to look at tailoring a plan for your business, you can contact:

Jack Bertram is a Certified Facility Manager by the International Facility Management Association with over 30 years experience in operating and managing buildings and grounds. He can be reached at 707-938-2310 and at www.winefacility.com. Bobbie Bleistift Collins is a Risk Manager who has 15 years experience in financial, operational and strategic risk analysis in the financial industry, as a management consultant and as a business owner. She can be reached at 707-939-0464 or at bbleistift@aol.com.