

Preparing the Disaster-Recovery / Business-Continuation Plan

- Remember, a disaster plan is never a fixed finished document - it evolves and gets better as time goes by. Therefore, it doesn't have to be perfect the first time you do it - the important thing is to get started on it!
- Be systematic in your plan - don't try to outguess Nature and plan for a flood, a hurricane, a fire, etc. Instead, look at the common elements in any disaster:
 - loss of information,
 - loss of access to information & facilities,
 - loss of people.
- Make a matrix, with these three as the columns, and each of your activities as a row. (Beyond the obvious, your activities include things like "accounts receivable," "payroll," "real estate management," etc., depending on your situation.) Then figure out how you would respond to loss of information, access, and/or personnel for each function.
- Appoint a second in command. If the person normally in charge is injured in the disaster or not available, the second in command should be named in the plan, and delegated full authority in this situation. If you can't name someone, you have already pinpointed one of your greatest vulnerabilities!
- List individual responsibilities ahead of time, and assign specific people to each task. Again, beyond the obvious, this includes tasks such as notifying your suppliers where to deliver, calling your most important customers to tell them what has happened, calling your Board members, etc.
- Protect critical paper records. Even in a fully automated organization, there can be vulnerable records - such as "pending" contracts, advertising, research, loan applications, etc. - which only exist on paper.
- Set clear priorities among your activities. After a disaster, you will not return everything to normal at the same time. Decide beforehand the longest amount of time you are willing to be "dead in the water" for each of your activities.
- Have a backup connection to your main computer. Make sure that your main computer (either at your service bureau, your main office, or your hotsite) can "dial out" in the event that your leased-lines are lost, or in the event that you must relocate to a different site.
- Make sure that employees can exit without a key. This may sound obvious, but in many organizations, once the doors are locked at the end of the day to keep the customers out, employees staying late to process work are locked in.
- Keep copies of all of your forms off site. This includes extra checks so that you can buy the emergency supplies you need.
- Keep a copy of your disaster plan at home. Make sure it includes the home phone numbers of the service people you rely on: your insurance agent, plumber, electrician, etc.