

National Preparedness Month – September 2008:

GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS:

Emergency Preparedness in the Workplace

By John Cavanagh and Anne Malia

Whether one works part time, overtime, or all the time, a good deal of most people's hours are spent at their place of employment. Employers and employees take note: Should a disaster strike, there is a real probability that it will occur during work hours. The Department of Homeland Security has designated the second week of National Preparedness Month "Business Preparedness Week." Its premise is that America's businesses form the backbone of the nation's economy. Therefore, if businesses are prepared to withstand and recover from disasters, the nation and our economy will be more secure. In 2006, the United States Small Business Administration reported that up to 25 percent of businesses do not reopen after a major disaster. The reason given is that these businesses are unprepared for a disaster because they have no emergency plans in place. No business, small or large, should risk operating unprepared for an emergency.

When developing a plan...

When developing an emergency plan, it is advisable to contact others who have already instituted risk or contingency management plans. Another progressive step is to attend seminars and seek out information from local risk management associations or chapters. The Red Cross recommends that, when a business begins to develop a disaster plan, there should be consideration as to how a disaster could affect employees, customers and the workplace. Consider scenarios in which your business could continue operating if the area around the facility was closed or the streets were blocked. Another useful precaution is to designate and educate one employee from each work shift to serve as a safety coordinator. This person will make all decisions relating to employee, customer, and facility safety. Safety coordinators should know how to contact the owner or

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operator of the business at all times. Further suggestions from the Red Cross include:

- Keep phone lists of employees with you, and provide copies to key staff members.
- If you have a voice mail system at your office, designate one remote number on which you can record messages for employees in case of emergencies.
- Install emergency lights that activate when the power goes out.
- Use surge protectors and battery backup systems to add protection for sensitive equipment and to help prevent a computer crash in case of a power outage.
- Purchase a NOAA Weather Radio with a tone alert feature. Keep it on, and when the signal sounds, listen for information about severe weather and protective actions to take.
- Stock a minimum supply of the goods, materials and equipment you would need for business continuity.
- Keep emergency supplies handy, including:
 - Flashlights with extra batteries
 - First aid kit
 - Tools
 - Food and water for employees and customers to use during a period of unexpected confinement at your business

Emergency Management

“Emergency management” is the vigorous process of preparing for, responding to and recovering from a disaster. Emergency planning is essential, but it is not the only necessary action. Training, conducting drills, testing equipment and coordinating activities with the community are essential.

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Emergency management calls for executive support. Upper management sets the stage by authorizing planning to occur, and by instructing senior management to carry out the initiative. When presenting the need for emergency management, emphasize the positive consequences of preparedness, such as the facilitation of compliance with regulatory requirements of federal, state and local agencies. It also enhances a company's public image and credibility with employees, customers, and the community in general, and may also reduce a company's insurance premiums. Emergencies do not "punch the clock"—they can happen at any time, so it is imperative that everyone in a place of business is prepared.

Resources – Business Preparedness Guide:

Emergency Preparedness Guide for Businesses
<http://www.fema.gov/business/guide/index.shtm>

FEMA offers an online guide that provides step-by-step advice on how to create and maintain a comprehensive emergency management program. The guide can be used by manufacturers, corporate offices, retailers, utilities or any organization where a sizable number of people work or gather.

About The Authors

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Article inquiries welcome. On request, we can provide feature-length articles tailored to your audience and requirements. **Please contact John Cavanagh at Bridge Multimedia: (212) 213-3740 or jcavanagh@bridgemultimedia.com.**