

Seven Ways to Prepare Your Organization for an Emergency

Your organization probably has plans in place for nearly any situation, but have your executives considered what should be done to prepare for, or in case of, an emergency? Besides natural disasters, more common problems faced by companies and nonprofits include theft, fire, or data loss, and making sure you are prepared for the worst before it happens can save big headaches in the long run.

A July 2012 Sage study found that 61% of surveyed small businesses have not established a formal emergency or disaster preparedness plan. Those businesses cited not having any past issues to influence the decision to develop a plan (33%), not thinking about it (30%), or not thinking it is important for their business (27%) as their reasons.

Although some executives may believe their organization is not at risk for disaster, it is crucial to always consider and prepare for a worst-case scenario. Below are some tips to help you begin to prepare for, deal with, and overcome an emergency situation.

1. **Draft and share a basic emergency plan with your staff**—Even though it is not always possible to plan ahead for a crisis, outlining the main issues your business could potentially face and the actions you would need to take to prevent and/or solve them will give you a great advantage if an emergency does take place. Research government agency or business association sites, such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) emergency preparedness [website](#), for resources and strategies to deal with both natural and man-made disasters. Then share your plan with employees. Only share sensitive information in the plan with those who need to know it, but share general actions and perform emergency drills and exercises with all employees.
2. **Develop a disaster recovery plan**—A good disaster recovery plan (DRP) includes preparations for the resumption of applications, data, hardware, communications (such as networking), and other IT infrastructure. You need to have a good back-up strategy. Whether you choose an on-site system, an off-site server, or the cloud, backing up your information on a very regular basis—about twice each week—could be the difference between emergency recovery and the end of your business. If you live in tornado, hurricane, or earthquake country, an off-site server or the cloud may be your best option. Just make sure you go for a solution with a strong brand that has a proven track record for providing secure systems. It is also important to know how many physical IT assets you own so you can tell your insurance company when they ask, as well as more easily determine what computers and applications should be rebuilt first.
3. **Understand digital doesn't mean forever**—Did you know most banks only keep your digital statements for five years? After that, they are unrecoverable. To avoid surprises, use software that creates and stores your financial statements or download your monthly bank statements—and back them up. You never know when you might need them.

4. **Have an attorney you can contact in case of emergency**—Hiring an attorney has become an important and necessary part of doing business. A lawyer can help you through difficult situations such as an accident in your facility or a product recall.
5. **Get insurance and invest in prevention**—While insurance may be costly and seem unnecessary for a rare, potential event, you will be glad your organization is covered if the situation does take place. Also, investing in a security system and waterproof safe may save you thousands if and when a crisis hits.
6. **Designate an emergency point person**—It is essential that more than one person knows critical information, such as passwords or the location of an important document. Select a trusted person who can implement the emergency plan, handle financial or legal matters, or recover information in the event you are unable to do it.
7. **Consult with a professional**—If you are unsure how to identify the potential issues your organization needs to be prepared for or how to plan for recovery, schedule an appointment with a consultant who can not only point out possible crises you may not have considered, but also inform you of the best solutions for your type of organization.

Life is full of unexpected events. The more you prepare for potential emergencies, the easier and cheaper it will be to recover.