

Disaster Ready

By: Katie Tucker, Sales Representative, Rolyn Companies, Inc

Are you and your facility disaster ready? As reported by the Red Cross, as many as 40 percent of small businesses do not reopen after a major disaster like a flood, tornado or earthquake. In many cases, **these businesses had no disaster plans or back-up systems in place to assist in their recovery.** Aristotle said it best, “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, therefore, is not an act but a habit.” The same is true for disaster preparedness and emergency management. As persons responsible for facility management, we must continuously examine the inherent frailty of most facilities, until it becomes a habit. Only then can we say with confidence that we are prepared for disaster. The purpose of this paper is to focus on disaster preparedness as it relates to the physical facility, what can be done to avert possible damage and how to recover quickly with the least business disruption.

Types of Facility Disasters

Natural disasters such as storms that cause wind or water related damage are typical disasters for not only coastal facilities, but also those located inland. Besides natural occurrences such as hurricanes, tornadoes, and floods, water damage can come from many manmade sources such as plumbing, sprinkler systems and HVAC systems. Regardless of the cause, an unstable environment and high humidity creates an ideal environment for microbial growth, which can lead to further structural damage and also be hazardous to occupants.

Fire-related disasters are often just as destructive as those caused by water. Not only do fires produce enormous amounts of heat, smoke, and toxic gases, the process of accessing and extinguishing the fire may cause as much or more damage than the fire itself. In an effort to access the building, responders may knock out windows and doors or cut entryways through exterior and interior structures. Most buildings have fire suppression systems and the fire department also seeks to extinguish the flames, both causing massive water damage to areas that may or may not be directly impacted by the flames.

There are also many manmade events that can cause significant damage to properties or require specialized emergency response clean up or remediation. For example, a bombing, shooting inside a building or chemical spill, even in a neighboring facility, can impact your facility. Even a disruption of water, electricity or gas can cause major interference to business and having a plan for dealing with it can reduce the impact.

A Process for Disaster Preparedness

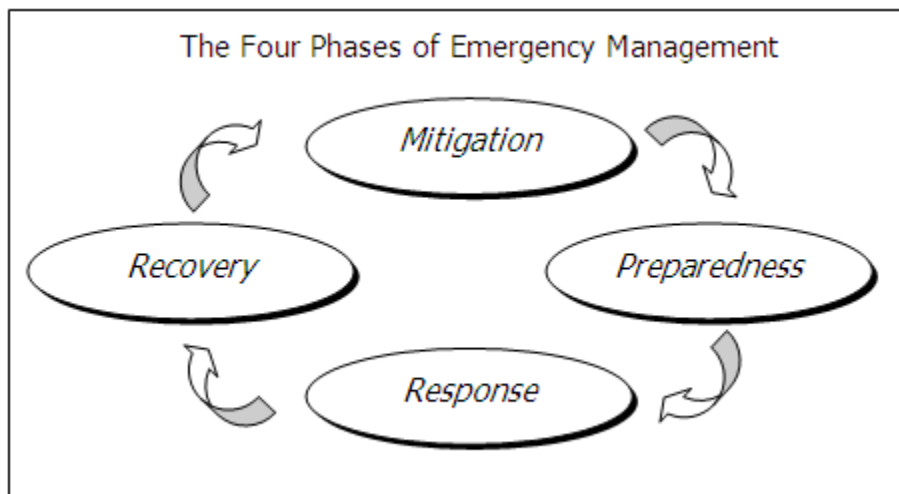
Disaster preparedness involves a proactive approach to emergency management. It is composed of a continuous cycle of thoughtful activities. The National Incident Management System (NIMS) defines preparedness as "a continuous cycle of planning, organizing, training, equipping, exercising, evaluating, and taking corrective action in an effort to ensure effective coordination during incident response."

The Continuous Cycle of Disaster Preparedness

- Assemble an interdisciplinary team of key stakeholders for disaster planning.
- Review current resources, strengths, and weaknesses.
- Develop a detailed, written disaster response plan.
- Disseminate and practice the plan through education and drills.
- Evaluate the adequacy of knowledge, skills, and resources.
- Revise the plan based on objective data and lessons learned.
- Modify education and training as needed to target areas of weakness.
- Continuously repeat these steps.



According to FEMA, there are four phases of Emergency Management, the first step being Mitigation.



Mitigation activities begin before an emergency event occurs. Disaster planning is a critical component of being prepared for unfortunate events. Planning can often help prevent the emergency in some instances and seeks to reduce the damaging effects of the event by being well prepared.

- Identify and evaluate which hazards can happen to your property and arrange for back-up plans should they occur:
 - Electrical Power Emergency
 - Interior Flooding
 - Elevators and Escalators
 - Fire Emergency
 - Hazardous Materials/Spills Emergencies
 - Indoor Air Quality
 - Storm Preparedness
 - Water Loss
 - Vandalism
 - Employee Error
- Examine your insurance coverage and familiarize yourself with its limits and exclusions;
- Understand the facility's history and focus on what could affect the integrity of the building (e.g. age of the building, renovations, modifications, etc...);
- Conduct inspections that cover all building materials and components of a structure;
- Regular maintenance of the facility is critical; and
- Monitor weather activities in your area.

Consider structural retrofitting to deter or lessen the impact of incidents and reduce loss of life, destruction of property, and impact on the environment (e.g. installing sump pumps, earthquake strengthening, building exterior retaining walls to prevent high water ingress, strengthening a roof for heavier snow loads, etc...).

Preparedness activities take place before an emergency event occurs. This is when facility managers develop an action plan for when disaster strikes.

- Develop protocols with your disaster recovery firm ahead of time to assure that resources will be made immediately available to your facility; understand their capabilities, insurance coverage's, certifications, conduct reference checks and agree to rates in advance of the emergency;

- Arrange for the procurement, storage and maintenance of emergency supplies, power and equipment as they are often rapidly depleted and heavily taxed during a regional catastrophe;
- Identify which of your property's structures require protection and how you will protect them (e.g. securing tanks and other large items that may float away, sand-bag the fronts of electrical equipment rooms to limit the entry of water and debris);
- Regularly update and disseminate emergency personnel's contact information including phone numbers, pagers and email addresses; document who should be notified in the event the facility is closed due to an emergency, and what the notification process is;
- Obtain site plan of the facility showing all buildings and underground utilities;
- Acquire basic floor plans of each building;
- Photo documentation of current condition of property;
- Locate all emergency equipment including sprinklers, block valves, emergency generators, fuel tanks, any materials or supplies that require special handling, chemicals, hazmat storage and underground utilities;
- Identify shut off valves and switches for gas, oil, water and electricity;
- Move sensitive equipment and contents to higher ground to prevent water damage and take precautions for items that may fall;
- Have an understanding of egress routes for facility evacuation; and
- Acquire incident information that occurred onsite within the last two years pertaining to facilities.

Response plans prevent further property damage in an emergency situation and involve putting your preparedness plans into action. The response should encompass immediate actions in reacting to the emergency. Health and life safety should be the most important concern. Your effectiveness in the response portion will affect the length of your facility's downtime.

- Notify your Disaster Recovery firm;
- Perform damage assessment and begin mitigation activities to prevent further damage to your facility (this could include containment, air scrubbing, drying, debris removal, board-up, structural stabilization, or other restoration services);
- Establish a secure salvage area for supplies such as fans, tables, shelves, plastic sheeting, drying materials and clean water; and

- Make provisions to prevent further loss due to vandalism, theft, accidents, and exposure to dangerous elements (e.g. hiring security personnel, installing perimeter fencing, etc...).

Recovery entails actions taken to return to a normal or an even safer situation following an emergency. It is critical that in this stage you document everything! Key components and objectives of the restoration portion of a disaster plan should include:

- Continuation of a healthy and safe work environment;
- Minimal interruption to business and service operations;
- Resumption of critical operations within a specified time frame;
- Minimal financial loss; and
- Assurance to all stakeholders that the organization is functional.

Disasters come in many forms, and it is virtually impossible to be completely ready for every situation that may affect a facility. How a facility and its people fare in the event of a disaster may be predicated on the status of the preparedness plan and how it is positioned to respond to such calamities. Having some safety procedures in place to respond quickly may help save lives, property, and the organization's well-being. With comprehensive planning, facilities can implement systems and guidelines to mitigate impact and ensure business continuity. Small investments now will provide big returns when disasters do strike.

RESOURCES

American Red Cross - www.redcross.org/en

ASIS International - www.asisonline.org

Disaster Resource Guide - www.disaster-resource.com

FacilitiesNet - www.facilitiesnet.com

FEMA - www.fema.gov; www.ready.gov

Professional Development: Creating A Plan For Disaster - www.todaysfacilitymanager.com

Restoration Industry Association - www.restorationindustry.org

Rolyn Companies, Inc. – www.rolyncompanies.com