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How to Prepare Your Business for a Disaster

The H Agency www.theHagency.com

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Why plan? Taking specific actions to prepare for a disaster is the healthiest way any of us can deal with the fear and frustration of facing any natural disaster. Advance preparation gives you control of your situation, and gives you the resiliency to return to business after a disaster occurs.

Some of the benefits for disaster planning:

- Protect your employees, their families, friends and your community
- Protect your business – property, records (paper and electronic), products and equipment
- Increase your business's ability to recover from damages to your office, equipment, and financial losses associated with business interruption and loss of income
- Enhance your company's image and credibility with employees, clients, customers, vendors and community
- Comply with local, state and federal laws and regulations
- Reduce your business's liability to lawsuits
- Minimize your business's insurance premiums

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Headquarters: 1055 Saint Charles Avenue, Suite 300, New Orleans, LA 70130
Phone 504-522-6300 Fax 504-524-6359 Email info@theHagency.com



DISASTER PLANNING

OVERVIEW OF THE PLANNING PROCESS

Planning for the unthinkable. Businesses and residents in New Orleans knew for years of the potential threat of a major flood from a serious storm. Businesses and residents in California live with the ever-present treat of a major earthquake. No one wants to think or believe a disaster will happen—until it happens.

A commitment from management. The commitment to disaster planning must start at the top in a business. Without an owner's or senior manager's confidence in the plan and its benefits, there's little likelihood that employees will make planning activities a priority.

Consider the possibilities. Being prepared means envisioning the range of possible emergencies that can impact your business operations before they happen, then developing a plan for how you will respond. The process involves everyone within a small company (or a family), as well as those connected with a business, such as clients, vendors, suppliers, etc.

Your planning activities will include:

- Assessing the potential threats
- Developing a written plan
- Training and preparing your employees
- Purchasing, testing and maintaining back-up equipment
- Informing neighboring businesses, employees, clients, customers, vendors and family members of the parts of your plan that affect them

A position of preparation is a position of strength

Preparation empowers you and your business. It helps you face an emergency with a sense of confidence—you know what needs to be done and therefore are more likely to do it calmly and efficiently. From this place of readiness, you also can help others. You can share your confidence with your employees, clients, family and friends. As the Red Cross says on its website—"you never know how many lives may be changed or saved, just because you're prepared."



DISASTER PLANNING

CREATING YOUR PLAN

Determine your risks. To determine how seriously a disaster might impact the financial and physical aspects of your business, make a list of the different types of emergencies/disasters that might occur and the probability of each. Next, prioritize the different situations and estimate what resources (money, people, time) your business would need to mitigate the impact of each emergency.

Evaluate your resources. Once you determine the risks associated with different types of disasters or emergencies, you can realistically evaluate how well your business is prepared for each. Make another check list—do you have any of the following plans or procedures already in place:

- An evacuation plan
- A fire protection plan
- A safety and health program
- Environmental safety policies
- Security procedures (in case of break-in or damage to building)
- Insurance programs
- A facility closing policy
- Can your employees provide services from home?
- Can you operate your business from an alternative location?
- In case of a power failure, do you have a back-up electricity source such as a generator?

Assess your current situation. When you've considered the types of emergencies and their possible impact, you will have a better understanding of your current preparedness for any emergency, and also have a clearer idea of the internal and external resources available for you to meet each situation. You'll gain a better understanding of the weaknesses in your business processes, and be able to estimate the financial impact on your business if you have to close for a day or longer, and even how to prepare for a temporary change of location.



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What goes into your plan?

With your assessment information in hand, you can begin to create an emergency plan for your business and situation. Your plan should contain processes and procedures on how to protect your employees and how to restore critical functions in your business in several emergency situations. Your plan will contain processes and procedures on how to restore critical functions in your business in several emergency situations. An Emergency Action Plan (EAP) can address your employee's safety. A Business Continuity Plan (BCP) can address your business processes and resources. Your plan can also identify the roles and responsibilities of key staff (e.g., how the crisis team would implement the plan). Include emergency supplies and equipment as part of your plan.

Here are examples of some of the things your plan might include:

1. **Human resources** – This includes your staff, clients and vendors.

- Create a phone and e-mail list of key employees, and a contact person who would always know their whereabouts in case of an evacuation. Make sure everyone has a copy.
- Provide staff with an offsite voice-mail number that they can call for news and updates during an evacuation.
- Make a list of emergency contact persons for your office or building, and learn how to use life-saving tools such as fire extinguishers.
- Find out if there's an emergency evacuation plan for your building. Then share this with your staff. Conduct drills.
- Tell everyone where emergency information and supplies are stored. Provide copies of your preparedness plan to each staff member. Make sure your information is up-to-date and that everyone understands evacuation procedures and communication processes covered in your plan.
- Keep up with the news. Find out how to get information during a disaster or emergency. Such as: local radio, television, NOAA weather station, telephone text messaging, local emergency warning systems and person to person contacts.



DISASTER PLANNING

2. Physical resources – This includes your office or facility, office equipment and technologies that support your business operations.

- For small businesses, make sure more than one person has keys to your office, including one person who lives closest to the building.
- Identify critical technology, equipment, services and processes including information storage and retrieval systems and processes.
- Back up computer data every day, or several times a day. Keep duplicate files off site.
- Keep a supply of office materials and equipment that you may need to continue doing business for several days after a disaster.
- Emergency supplies - Keep a first-aid kit, flashlights, batteries, tools and water on-site.
- A cache of food is helpful in case of an emergency that prevents you from leaving your building for several hours or overnight. Remember to check your supplies regularly to keep enough on hand.
- Check into a programmable call forwarding telephone system for your main business phone, then if you can't get to your office you can call in and forward calls to another phone number.

3. Business continuation – This part of your plan considers how you could continue doing business if your office building is closed or the streets to your office are impassable. Evaluate what resources you would need to continue to serve your customers even if your office is closed.

- Select a potential alternate location(s) for your business operation should you not be able to return to your current office.
- If your business is located in a multi-tenant building, coordinate and share your emergency plan with your building management.
- Determine a procedure to notify employees of an emergency and for employees to report in during an emergency or evacuation.
- Create a process to update contact information regularly.
- Ensure that your key staff has the equipment (computers, telephones, etc.) to work from an alternate site, and that essential business records are accessible.
- Talk to your insurance agent about special precautions or coverage you may need to protect computers or other valuable equipment. Learn about business continuity insurance and determine if it's right for your business size and structure.



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In Conclusion

How is this relevant for you? In everyone's life, no matter where you live, your environment holds the possibility for a disaster. Even though you don't think it will ever happen, it could, in a minute. A disaster can come from anywhere. From employee espionage, fire, earthquake, tornado, flood, terrorist attack, anything.

Being prepared is being empowered. When a serious disaster occurs, you can't count on any institution or government service to help right away. Their ability to respond to a disaster will be impaired by the same emergency circumstances you're facing. Your immediate family, friends and community are your greatest resource, and your preparation will be your greatest strength. Being prepared gives you the clarity of thought and action that could save your business or your life.

A be-prepared guide for you. From what we learned going through Hurricane Katrina, we created the attached preparedness guides. Use them, share them. We hope they help you and your business to be better prepared and more empowered to handle any emergency.



DISASTER PLANNING

RESOURCES

Spread the readiness around. For you, your friends, family and kids. Disaster planning can be a positive experience for all. You can learn more about disaster preparedness for your business or home at one of these helpful online resources. There's even fun and educational resources for kids and information to protect your pets.

American Red Cross

Disaster Services

<http://www.redcross.org/> – Offers a wide range of disaster preparedness information.

Emergency.Louisiana.gov

http://emergency.louisiana.gov/Disaster_Evaluation_Guide.html – Contains evacuation and emergency information for Louisiana including state disaster agencies and emergency radio stations.

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Ready Business Guide

ready.gov/ – Information for your home, business and kids.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

Emergency Management Guide for Business and Industry

<http://www.fema.gov/>

www.fema.gov/kids – A fun and educational site for kids to get involved with disaster planning.

Ready America

“Preparing your pets for emergencies...”

www.ready.gov/america/getakit/pets.html – A special section of this site has helpful information about including your pets in your disaster preparedness plans.

ASIS International

Business Continuity Guidelines

<http://www.asisonline.org/>



DISASTER PLANNING

Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) - U.S. Department of Labor

How to Plan for Workplace Emergencies and Evacuations, Publication 3088

Evacuation Plans and Procedures eTool

<http://www.osha.gov/>

Open for Business, a booklet developed by the Institute for Business and Home Safety and the Small Business Administration is available at:

<http://www.ibhs.org>

National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)

NFPA's Life Safety Code 101

Introduction to Employee Fire and Life Safety

NFPA 1600

<http://www.nfpa.org>

Public Entity Risk Institute

Risk Management for Small Business

<http://www.riskinstitute.org/peri/>

WHAT DO YOU STAND FOR?TM

The H Agency is a strategic branding firm founded in 1990 by owner and creative director Winnie Hart and now with offices in New Orleans and Houston. The company has grown from a local New Orleans design firm into a regional strategic branding company that specializes in developing marketing programs and brand strategies for health and wellness, financial services, and consumer and retail companies.

The “H” in The H Agency stands for the things that make us unique — heart, horsepower, helpful, high-flying and heroic. Defining the core values we practice each day in our work and relationships helps us refocus our perspective, rethink our strengths, and refine our continued path to success.

For more information about how to make your next direct marketing project more successful, contact The H Agency, 504-522-6300.

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