

A BRIEF GUIDE TO RESPONDING TO HURRICANES

INTRODUCTION

Businesses and organizations have a particular set of challenges during a hurricane. Major concerns are the safety and security of employees as well as damage to physical facilities and disaster recovery. However, business owners also face the challenge of maintaining operational continuity while minimizing the short and long-term impact on their customers, vendors, partners, and employees. The loss of communication and critical IS systems - even briefly -- can significantly affect revenue, customer satisfaction and supply chain operations.

Here are the steps you should take for your organization before a hurricane hits:

- Communication and leadership are crucial. Decide on a chain of command. Remember that some employees may not act rationally during an emergency. Others may not be available or able to get in to the facility after the storm.
- Decide what you should store off-site during a hurricane emergency and which computer systems and services you need to keep running at a hot site.
- Complete your emergency plan and be sure that all staff are familiar with all parts of the plan, knowing what to do, when to do it, how to do it, and why they are doing it.
- Test your emergency communications plan. In an emergency, your staff will need to know that you are in charge and have a handle on the situation to help guide them.

Take the following steps before the hurricane hits:

- Conduct a walk-through of your organization's business continuity plan. Look for business and computing changes since the plan you originally implemented the plan, you last tested the plan, or you revised the plan. Determine what changes in the plan may be necessary and then make them.
- Check your hurricane and flood emergency action plan and update it as necessary. If there are changes, make new copies and distribute it to all staff members. If possible, put a copy of the plan on a website hosted at your organization's hot site.
- If you do not have a plan in place, draft a basic plan for the impending storm. Keep it simple. Make sure you cover pre-event preparations, responsibilities during the storm, and cleanup once the authorities give the all clear.
- Contact the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) (<http://www.fema.gov/nfip/>) disaster flood mitigation and insurance protection program. The National Flood Insurance Program makes federally backed flood insurance available to residents and business owners.
- Authorized under Section 404 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provides grants to States and local governments to implement long-term hazard mitigation measures after a major disaster declaration.

Work with your state and local community, which should have a Hazard Mitigation grant. Hazard mitigation planning is an important aspect of a successful mitigation program. States and communities use the hazard mitigation planning process to set short and long-range mitigation goals and objectives. Hazard mitigation planning seeks to identify hazards affecting the community, assess vulnerability to the hazards, and determine how to minimize or eliminate the effects of these hazards. In recognition of the importance of planning, States with an approved

enhanced State Mitigation Plan in effect at the time of disaster declaration may receive additional HMGP funding. For more information, please visit the Planning website (<http://www.fema.gov/fema/planning.shtm>).

- Check that the standby generator, if you have one, operates properly. Make sure the fuel tank is full and that the fuel is uncontaminated. Arrange for a back up supply of fuel stored appropriately according to National Fire Protection Association standards.
- Make sure you have a current list of critical vendors and suppliers. You may need to contact them during and after the storm. Make sure that some of your vendors specialize in disaster recovery items such as solar powered radios, ready-to-eat meals, and protective equipment for your employees who will be doing clean up.
- Make sure you have a current list of all employees, their contact phone numbers, and their emergency contacts and phone numbers.
- Make sure that you or building management carefully trims all trees so they do not pose a threat to your facility. Ideally, there should be no trees close enough to the building to cause direct damage. Remove dead wood to reduce wind-blown debris.
- Make sure that you or building management ties down or securely stores movable objects around the building such as benches, decorative items, ashtrays, etc.
- Contact your insurance carrier and review your policy. Make sure you know what coverage your policy provides. Request that your insurance company review your business continuity and disaster recovery plans. Make sure that replacement equipment as well as records and documents are covered. Ensure that copies of updated insurance papers are included in your disaster supplies—and are stored at your hot site for protection.
- Make sure you have enough flashlights and batteries around your office and data center. Count the number of flashlights you think you will need and then double the number that you actually place around the office. Mark your emergency flashlight positions on a floor plan that you keep off site (preferably as a part of your business continuity and disaster recovery plan).
- Test your emergency communications capabilities. Can you get a hold of key staff members through multiple channels (cell phones, pagers, home phones, and remote office phones)? Does your emergency communications system provide alternatives if you cannot contact key members within the prescribed amount of time?
- Test your call system to desks, home phones, cell phones, Blackberries, pagers, etc.
- Test what happens if you are unable to contact key staff members. Does your emergency communications plan support this? Will your team adapt to a secondary leader taking charge?
- Shut off access to your data center's communications and find out what you should locate at your hot site (The hot site should be geographically far enough away so that it is not caught in any resulting natural disasters of its own.)
- Evaluate the safe locations inland where you plan to send priority documents, records and other important data. Verify that they are still operating and accessible.
- Review previously established remote work sites inland where you plan to convene key staff and equipment. Verify that all data connections are intact and working properly.
- Test the ability of your secondary team members to work remotely. Then begin testing the ability of other team members (from the most important to the least) to work remotely through Vans and other means.

Here are the actions you should take once the authority having jurisdiction announces a watch:

The weather service announces a Hurricane Watch when there is a threat of hurricane conditions within 24-36 hours.

- Implement your emergency communications. Communicate with everyone on your call list to determine if everyone can send and receive communications through email and voice systems.

- Have as many staff as possible stop their routine duties to begin preparations. This may necessitate suspending business.
- Listen to a battery-operated radio or television for hurricane progress reports. Make sure you have extra batteries on hand.
- Secure buildings by closing and boarding up windows. Remove outside antennas. Take in all loose objects on the grounds—benches, birdbaths, art works, etc.
- You should store trashcans and garden hoses securely. Make sure gates, doors and garage doors are closed and secure. Take down awnings and other items that may blow away.
- Turn your data center HVAC system to its coldest settings in case you have to “dump its load” to keep your UPS systems powering critical computers.
- Notify outside contractors and your hot site that you may be calling on their services in 24 to 48 hours. Prompt notification allows them to begin monitoring your situation. Ensure that the contractors and vendors are on your emergency call list.
- Make sure that your staff stores valuable organizational papers in waterproof containers on the highest level of your office or at an off-site storage facility. If you are going to use off-site storage, begin packing now. Contact your storage company for pick up or rent a sufficient size van or truck (you should have already worked out payment details, driver, size of vehicle needed, and company). This vehicle should be equipped with automatic shift, air conditioning, and an AM/FM radio. Place a first aid kit and fire extinguisher in the cab. At this point, your safe destination should be your hot site or remote inland worksite.
- If you are going to continue working, review the evacuation plan and emergency communications plan.
- Begin preparations in the building. Have staff members clear their desks. Put all papers, files and other materials in waterproof containers or under a waterproof cover.
- Terminate all basic client services.
- Identify shelters established by the city and distribute this information to all staff members just in case they need the assistance. Make sure that elderly, pregnant, or disabled staff members have assistance and release them from further duties.
- Fill water storage containers and store them at several locations in the building where, if they rupture, the water will not damage equipment and documents.
- Make sure you fill your vehicles with gas. Consider installing locking gas caps to prevent the loss of fuel by theft.
- Talk with your staff about their responsibilities after the storm is over. Decide which staff members should report first to conduct a damage assessment. Do not enter the facility unless you have an all clear from the jurisdiction having authority that the building is safe to enter. Make sure everybody knows his or her role and responsibilities after the storm. Communication with your staff may not be possible during the first 48 hours after a storm, so plan ahead.

Here are the actions you should take once the authority having jurisdiction announces a warning:

The weather service issues a Hurricane Warning when they expect hurricane conditions (winds of 74 miles per hour or greater, and/or dangerously high water and rough seas) in 24 hours or less.

- Implement your emergency communications “hurricane warning” plan.
- If you lose power, unplug (do not just turn off) all computer systems to avoid any potential problem of a power “surge” when the electricity comes back on.
- If time permits, and you live in an identified surge zone, elevate all key paperwork and computers to protect them from flooding. Better yet, move them to a higher floor if you have one. If possible, move valuable documents and records away from windows (this becomes even more important if you do not have hurricane shutters). Cover everything with plastic sheeting and secure with tape so that the wind will not blow off the plastic.

- Brace double doors and garage or loading dock doors. Limit access to the building to one or two points, so you can close the other down. Use silicone caulk under doors at any point that water could enter.
- Obtain several hundred dollars in petty cash for post-hurricane emergency supplies.
- Move half of your company's vehicles to a public parking garage. While you can expect damage from flying debris, parking structures are typically able to withstand even major hurricanes. Although you may not be able to reclaim the vehicles for several days, implementing this measure should increase the chances that the vehicles will survive. If you leave vehicles at your facility, put them under cover if possible. If that is not possible, park the vehicles as close to the building as possible. This should offer protection to at least one side of the vehicles from wind and flying debris. Try to anticipate the direction of the wind and park the vehicles on the downwind side.
- If you have any rooftop items such as antennas and satellite dishes, remove them if possible.
- If you have a staff lounge or lunchroom with refrigerators, turn them to the coldest setting. If you have a walk-in cooler, turn it to the lowest setting.
- Conduct a thorough walk-through of your facility to make sure that you have taken all the steps you can to prevent or reduce damage.
- Listen to weather bulletins and the advice of local authorities. Determine if there is a need for staff to stay in the building. If not, allow your staff to leave the building, securing the last hurricane shutters as they leave.
- Send employees home as quickly as possible. They need to be with their families, especially if an evacuation becomes necessary.

If officials order an evacuation:

- Implement the next stage of your emergency communications plan.
- Be sure to leave power to essential equipment on -- security, fire, emergency lighting, and environmental controls. Have the rest cut off. If your HVAC system does not use gas, but there are gas lines entering the building, shut them off at the main. If time permits, have building maintenance turn off main electricity and the main water valve.
- Leave the evacuation area as quickly as possible. Avoid flooded roads and watch for washed-out bridges.
- Lock up the building and leave.
- Advise police and fire chiefs of your status.

After The Hurricane: Facilitating the Disaster Recovery Process

- Once you know the hurricane is over, you will need to go back to the plan and implement your recovery scenarios. Get someone on site as quickly as possible to assess the damage and to prevent vandalism or theft if the damage is great enough to allow it.
- Enter your building with caution. Beware of snakes, insects, and animals driven to higher ground by floodwater.
- Take pictures of the damage, both to the building and its contents for insurance claims.
- Your disaster recovery plan should include a set of steps for recovery, beginning with the restoration of communications, activation of the hot site, and restoration procedures for bringing staff activities back to normal.
- Communicate with your people, your clients and your vendors and contractors as you proceed. Let them know if you are on schedule for recovery. Tell your staff how the recovery and restoration are progressing.

- Look for damage to your electrical system. If you see sparks or broken or frayed wires, or if you smell hot insulation, turn off the electricity at the main circuit breaker -- if you did not do that before leaving the building. If you have to step in water to get to the circuit breaker, first call an electrician for advice.
- Check for damage to sewage and water lines. If you suspect damage to sewer lines, do not use the toilets and call a plumber. If there is damage to water pipes, contact the water company and avoid using tap water.
- If you have a raised floor in the data center, and the data center is on the ground floor (or below), lift the floor panels and check below them for leakage or flooding. If you have power cables running under the floor as well as data cables, do not power up the systems. Call an expert and stay safe.
- Take moisture readings around window casings, exterior doors and roof vents, etc. in order to locate hidden water damage.
- Rapidly eliminating the damaging effects of water is crucial. When the water source has subsided, have a professional extract water immediately to prevent health hazards and further damage. Then complete restorative drying, including a mildew-cide treatment.
- Prevent further damage or vandalism. Most insurance companies state that,
“...the insured is responsible for taking any reasonable and prudent steps necessary to preserve, protect and secure the structure and contents from further damage.”
You cannot stop a hurricane, but you must take steps to limit further damage from continued hazards, theft, or vandals.
During or after water removal, you need to prevent any potential damage. Therefore, take steps to protect and secure your property and computer systems from weather and other factors as much as possible.
- You will need to take these steps even before adjuster has the opportunity to survey the damage.