

Resources at the Ready

Emergency Preparedness Planning for Your Business

A catastrophic event will put your property and customers at risk, and can be detrimental to your brand. Emergencies, disasters and other crises don't occur at convenient times. Whether dealing with hurricanes, floods or blizzards, or widespread serious illness such as a viral outbreak or acts of terrorism or violence, businesses need to prepare for the impact of a multitude of hazards.

While organizational leaders invest a significant amount of time, money and resources to make their ventures a success, few businesses plan for disaster scenarios. Weather emergencies alone pose a significant risk. According to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, in 2015 there were 10 weather and climate disaster events with losses exceeding \$1 billion each across the United States.

Whether you're operating a manufacturing facility, college campus, commercial office building, or another location, it is important to have an emergency plan in place to help raise awareness and prepare for these events, and strengthen the response capability of communities at risk. No one wants to think about a future emergency but without appropriate preparedness planning, your next emergency could truly turn into a disaster. To reduce the impact of emergencies, it is imperative to prepare today with real world response plans designed to aid in response and recovery.

Create a Preparedness Program for Your Business

The best way for businesses to manage risks is to identify and evaluate all possible scenarios and create a contingency plan detailing how to deal with the emergency if it occurs. This plan should detail strategies for dealing with emergencies specific to your location and type of business as well as general risks that apply across all industries.

Before developing your plan, decide who is responsible for the maintenance and practice of the emergency plan. Additionally, larger organizations may consider creating plans for individual departments or locations overseen by a team of personnel, while smaller or more streamlined organizations may only require one plan. Either way, collaboration and communication are essential to ensuring a coordinated response to an emergency.

Access Available Resources

When developing or updating an emergency preparedness plan for your business, it is important to utilize available resources to ensure that your plan addresses every conceivable contingency. Fortunately, there are a variety of options available online to help guide your plan creation or review process.

Ready.gov – The Federal government's Ready.gov features [Preparedness Planning for Your Business](#) which assists businesses in “developing preparedness plans by providing the tools to create a plan that addresses the impact of many hazards. The five steps in developing a preparedness program are Program Management, Planning, Implementation, Testing and Exercises and Program Improvement.”

Federal Emergency Management Agency – FEMA provides an overview of the [National Preparedness System](#) which provides specific tools and resources to help businesses through the emergency preparedness planning process. They identify the types of incidents that pose the greatest threat to homeland security and outline an organized process for companies to achieve their preparedness goals.

FEMA's [Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment Guide](#) provide guidance for conducting a Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment. This guide describes a four-step process:

1. Identify the Threats and Hazards of Concern.
2. Give the Threats and Hazards Context.
3. Establish Capability Targets.
4. Apply the Results

U.S. Small Business Administration – The SBA’s PrepareMyBusiness.org site reports that 40 to 60% of small businesses never reopen following a disaster. Their site offers assistance on [planning](#), [education](#), [testing](#) and [disaster assistance](#).

Building Owners and Managers Association International – BOMA states that “building owners and managers must develop or update a comprehensive preparedness plan for each building based on reasonable threat analyses to prepare for future emergencies and to provide a safe working environment for their tenants.” BOMA’s [Emergency Preparedness Guidebook: The Property Professional’s Resource for Developing Emergency Plans for Natural and Human-Based Threats](#) helps property professionals prepare for and respond to a wide range of potential threats with a step-by-step walk through the four phases of emergency management – mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery.

ASIS – ASIS International’s [Business Continuity Guideline: A Practical Approach for Emergency Preparedness, Crisis Management, and Disaster Recovery](#) covers a series of interrelated processes and activities that will assist in creating, testing, and maintaining a comprehensive plan for use in the event of an emergency or crisis that threatens the viability and business continuity of an organization. This includes step-by-step business continuity plan preparation and activation guidance, including readiness, prevention, response, and resumption/recovery.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – The CDC offers [emergency response resources](#) for business which provides a comprehensive plan for “dealing with terrorism-related events with specific instructions to building occupants, actions to be taken by facility management and first responder notification procedures.”

American Red Cross – The American Red Cross [Ready Rating](#)™ is a free membership program designed to help businesses become better prepared for emergencies which provides a 123-point self-assessment of your company’s level of preparedness and areas for improvement.

Evaluate and Utilize Internal Resources

Organizational leaders also need to look within their own ranks to identify resources who can help steer this process. Departmental areas of expertise that are often relied upon can include human resources, safety, security and risk management. Additionally, do not overlook the expertise of your contract security team. A quality security provider will possess emergency preparedness planning experience, and that, coupled with a thorough understanding of your facility and daily operations, positions your security team as a valuable contributor to your preparedness efforts. Also consider feedback from your stakeholders – their experiences and concerns can help develop critical components of your plan.

All of these resources are available to help guide businesses through the preparedness planning process. This includes both the establishment of an initial preparedness plan and its ongoing review as it is critical to ensure plans are always current. Plans should be reviewed regularly to ensure information is accurate and revisions are made to address changes in personnel, process or facilities. Just this short list of readily available resources emphasizes the critical nature of preparedness planning for every business. When an emergency occurs, will you be prepared?