

CREATING A DISASTER PREPAREDNESS PLAN

Creating a disaster preparedness plan and proactive decision-making can set your business up for employee safety, reduced loss, and an accelerated recovery phase. Below are five steps you can take to be fully prepared:

Identify What Matters Most

Identify key employees, business functions, and objectives essential to sustaining your business that would need support in the event of a disaster. What processes are critical to recovery and business continuity? Focus on your primary business goals and what operations are necessary to sustain the business or maintain cash flow. Perform a [business impact analysis](#) of the after-effects of the storm that can potentially disrupt operations, damage property, or cause unexpected expenses. Are there any employees whose absence would greatly impact operational efficiency? Build a plan that centers on these objectives and will minimize the impact of a storm on staff, property, operations, and assets.

Safeguard Physical Property

Brainstorm how each brick-and-mortar location will be supported, with attention to their proximity to flood zones. Identify possible hazards or obstructions that can severely damage your everyday operations: flooded highways preventing foot traffic, your building's proximity to flood zones, or glass storefront windows that make your property and inventory highly vulnerable to damage from the storm. Ways to prepare each location include obtaining batteries and generators, a backup water source, and a supply of gasoline-powered pumps to protect the lower levels from flooding. You may also consider boarding windows, anchoring large furniture, and sandbagging areas vulnerable to flooding. If you aren't already, shifting to a remote workforce may be best to minimize potential risks to your employees, assets, and inventory.

Protect Your Assets

Collect any essential physical documentation for your business, and back up all digital files to avoid chaos during and after the storm. Ensure that your files are saved in a facility or virtual location that is safe, secure, and dependable. Collecting these files in a "records-to-go" box that is fire- and waterproof is best. Gather customary documentation that will be ready and on hand in the event of a disaster, including:

- Evacuation policies and maps
- Emergency responders' contact list
- Emergency contacts for employees and clients
- Insurance policies and agent information
- Copies of licenses, permits, bank records, and tax returns

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- Year-to-date financial statements
- Lists of suppliers, creditors, and vendors
- Legal incorporation and Tax IDs

Implement an Effective Communications Strategy

Proactively develop your communication plan that you will use to coordinate emergency activities, provide live updates for employees, maintain communication with clients and suppliers, provide media updates, and implement your recovery plan. Establish backup communication plans in the event of phone service and reception or WIFI becoming inoperable during a storm. Ensure that your employees and designated disaster team are regularly fully trained so they may remain safe and assist in recovery.

Develop an Emergency Plan

Create a comprehensive disaster plan that details processes for risk management, step-by-step emergency protocols, and evacuation routes for each location. Your plan should identify important supplies, contacts, and communication plans for each team and pre-determine any necessary policy changes, such as your leave policy for impacted employees. Gather on-site materials to ensure the well-being of your employees and customers in the event of an immediate disaster, including:

- Food and water supplies
- Cots, sleeping bags, blankets, and pillows
- Hygiene products: soap, toothbrushes and toothpaste, towels, etc.
- Flashlights, batteries, candles, and matches
- First-aid kit
- Phone and computer chargers
- Battery-operated radio

Remember to always expect the unexpected. Flexible planning will enable you to quickly pivot and adapt to extreme scenarios.