

Disaster Recovery - Is Your Business Prepared?

The tragic fire disaster that recently struck Southern California caused the loss of more than 2,000 homes. What the media has not reported, but just as tragic has been the destruction or serious interruption of literally thousands of businesses.

The possibilities for disasters are numerous. They can happen without warning and when they do occur, there is insufficient time for planning and organizing, only scrambling to recover. Most disasters and their destruction cannot be prevented, however, you can prepare for the possibility by implementing a plan for expedient and successful recovery.

Many businesses today rely heavily on technology and automated systems, and their disruption for even a few days could cause severe financial loss and threaten survival. Continued operations depend on management's awareness of potential disasters and the capacity to develop a plan to minimize disruptions of daily operations.

Disasters are not just external or natural in nature. They could also be internal, technical or human related. If a natural disaster or terrorist attack occurs, it may impact the general geographic area, thereby affecting transportation and employees' ability to come to work. A partial or complete crash of information systems or the attack by a myriad of computer viruses could render your business helpless in meeting production deadlines and ascertaining your financial position. Additionally, an area often times overlooked in disaster planning is human resources. In the event one or more of your key people are incapacitated or fatally injured do you have a plan in place for management succession?

With some basic planning, preparing your workplace for an earthquake or other disaster is easy. The primary objective of your disaster recovery plan is to protect the organization if all or part of its operations and/or computer services are disrupted for a length of time. Consider the affects of liability, economic loss, disruptions to operations, organization stability, asset protection and the safety of personnel. The planning process should reduce to a minimum disruption of operations and ensure some level of organizational stability during an orderly recovery.

Some secondary objectives of a disaster recovery plan should include providing a sense of security, minimizing the risk of delays, guaranteeing the reliability of standby systems and minimizing decision-making.

Providing a Sense of Security – A good disaster recovery plan should provide a sense of security to management and personnel, knowing that alternatives have been considered for continued operations and that responsibilities of key personnel have been identified.

Minimizing the Risk of Delays – The plan should minimize the risks of delays incurred in setting up and changing operating locations. This will ensure that an operational system is available when needed and that management has anticipated its needs for the recovery.

Guaranteeing the Reliability of Standby Systems – A plan tested adequately should help guarantee that standby systems will perform reliably and effectively. This reliability should help build confidence that the system will continue to be operational for the time necessary to allow recovery activities to be completed.

Minimizing Decision Making During a Disaster – It is important to prepare for as many situations as possible before a disaster occurs. It may be difficult for management to make critical decisions under high stress and short deadlines. In addition, personnel may be affected emotionally by a disaster and communicating decisions rendered difficult. While all decisions cannot be made in advance, a disaster recovery plan can be the vehicle to accomplish many of the critical communications and decisions required under adverse conditions.

In addition to developing a plan to ensure the perpetuity of your business, emergency drills and back up information system testing should be performed on a regular basis. Don't wait for a disaster!

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