

To The Point

Resuming Business Operations After a Disaster

In the wake of a disaster, there are a number of steps that should be taken to resume business operations quickly. A return to normalcy requires collaboration among employees, suppliers, vendors, customers, insurance companies, insurance agents and brokers, government agencies and financial institutions, to name a few.

Communication

In a world of social media, 24-hour news, and other instantaneous methods of communication, it becomes increasingly important to communicate clearly and concisely with employees, customers, and business partners.

Employees and customers—Early messages should come from top management to provide reassurance and share restoration plans. There should be one individual chosen to communicate to all media platforms to ensure a consistent message goes out to employees and the public.

- It may be necessary to resume some operations at off-peak business hours or relocate to ensure full access to systems, telephones, and other office equipment. Communication vehicles could include social media, notification systems, 800 numbers, and company websites.
- Even if no operations are affected, notify all customers of availability. They may frequently assume the worst after seeing media images. This is especially important for distributors with a customer base covering a large geographic area.

Suppliers and vendors—Ask for flexibility and understanding after a disaster occurs. They may be able to provide the company with critical machinery or software, or be willing to establish alternative billing or delivery options until the business is back on its feet.

Government agencies and regulatory authorities—Establish regular communication to obtain approvals for resuming occupancy of the building or to reconstruct the facility. It may be outside the company's control when and if employees are allowed to re-enter the premises. If necessary, adjust plans until the proper clearances are in place.

Sources of funding—If applicable, contact the company's sources of funding for restoration activities, beginning with the insurance advisor or insurance carriers for property, business income/extra expense and workers compensation information. Also call the financial institutions to activate any pre-arranged secured line of credit and access any funds set aside for emergencies.

Returning to the Site and Resuming Operations

The first priority is protecting employees. Once the area is stable, secure the building to limit future loss, and inspect it thoroughly before anyone re-enters. Consider the following:

- Validate the structural integrity of the building or facility using professional engineers before employees return to the facility.
- Employees should have access only to those areas that are well-illuminated and free of debris, water, dust, or liquid spills.
- Make sure the electrical systems, computers, computer cables, and telecommunications equipment do not expose anyone to the dangers of electricity. Complete wiring inspections to ensure that all wiring and connections are not in danger due to water damage from rain or fire-fighting efforts.
- Check water supplies for contamination. Consider that even the slightest contact with contaminated water can lead to illness.
- If there has been water leakage such as flooding, seepage, or leaking pipes, take precautions with clean-up and replacement of building materials and equipment. Subcontracting operations that employees are not equipped to perform may be advisable. Cookware and kitchen utensils that have come into contact with floodwater will require special treatment.
- Investigate and ensure that the atmosphere in the workplace has been tested for asbestos or other chemical/ toxic agents.
- Make sure all hazardous materials are safely contained. Using an existing inventory list enables a quick accounting of all possible materials. Leakage of hazardous materials requires specialized clean-up and disposal, so be sure to address any situations with the proper precautions.
- If there was a power outage during the disaster, investigate the heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems before energizing and pressurizing them. Clean, examine and test safety devices and controls on all equipment. Identify current building code requirements including demolition and clean-up ordinances, fire protection and Americans with Disabilities Act requirements.

Learn More & Connect

For more information on protecting your business, contact your local risk engineer, visit the [Chubb Risk Consulting Library](#), or check out www.chubb.com/riskconsulting.

- Determine construction minimum standards for such things as earthquake, windstorm, or flood protection and obtain necessary permits. Establish priorities at the designated restoration site by identifying critical business applications and processes needed to stay in business. Business cannot be resumed without this step.
- Document all damage including estimates or prices for repair/ replacement and outline what is needed to resume operations. Establish a method of tracking additional expenses such as fuel for generators, travel expenses, or food for staff.
- Implement security procedures at the damaged facility to protect undamaged property. Ensure that access to the facility is controlled and protection systems have been reactivated.
- The operational integrity of safety devices and controls requires testing before the equipment can be returned to working order.
- Replace all filters on equipment. Dust, debris, and chemicals may clog ventilation systems.
- Use qualified professionals for the inspection of elevators and life safety systems to ensure they are functional.
- Have the fire and smoke alarms in the building cleaned and tested. Ensure that systems wired into other systems are still compatible and work properly.

The Human Element

Past disasters have shown that the most important component in resuming normal operations is the human element.

- In an area-wide disaster, employees will be dealing with their own loss of homes, property, and transportation. Prepare for accommodations such as:
 - Vans and carpooling
 - On-site day care
 - Flexible scheduling
- When a disaster happens, everyone involved feels a great deal of anxiety. If possible during restoration, schedule regular meetings with employees to communicate progress.
- Consider providing employee assistance services or engaging a crisis management firm to help employees deal with stress. Realize that everyone handles the emotional issues differently.
- Employees may be assigned different tasks, which may be difficult for them to perform. Provide appropriate training, including the proper selection and use of personal protective equipment such as eyewear, gloves, and dust masks/ respirators for people who are cleaning and restoring operations.
- When necessary, use the work done in the planning stages to refocus everyone's activities so they support the overall corporate objectives.

Resources

For more information about disaster response, visit the FEMA website at www.fema.gov.