

Writing a formal emergency action or business continuation plan is not only good planning, but a critical piece of business success.

Being Prepared

By Scott Kangas, CAPP

Every business—and parking is a business—should have a business continuation or emergency action plan (EAP). This is a plan of action should something (weather, hazardous chemical, fire, vandalism, etc.) occur that affects normal operations. The plan needs to address local, regional, and even national circumstances and cover all the potential risks you might encounter. If another September 11 shuts down airlines, rail lines, and other infrastructure services, what is your backup plan?

Think it can't happen to you? Primary risks for parking lots include tornadoes, flooding, high winds (downed trees blocking access), power outage, snow/ice events, chemical spill, or train derailments to name just a few. There are other significant risks that seem remote but are still relevant, including plane crash, vandalism/sabotage, building collapse, or mudslide. Other risks are also possible, such as nuclear accident, explosion (sewer, gas, or device), and incidents in other nearby facilities.

Downtown Minneapolis had a water main break last January that left it with no bathroom facilities and flooded parking lots in 19-degree weather. Traffic was diverted. How would your customers get to or from where they need to go in such a situation? If you operate depending on computers or electrical heat, what are you going to do after a storm blacks out the area? No power, no internet, and even a disgruntled former employee can take down your systems—it doesn't have to be a big event.



Plan A

SHUTTERSTOCK

Emergency
action plan

The image features a man in a light blue suit and tie, looking thoughtful with his hand to his chin. Overlaid on the image is a hand-drawn flowchart with black outlines. The top box is labeled 'Emergency action plan'. Two lines lead down from this box to two separate boxes: 'Plan B' on the left and 'Plan C' on the right. Below 'Plan B' is another empty box, and below 'Plan C' is another empty box. Lines from these boxes lead to a final empty box at the bottom center. The man's hand is visible on the left, holding a pen, suggesting he is drawing the chart.

Plan B

Plan C

Before Disaster Strikes

- Develop a written business continuation plan.
- Identify all major risks.
- Identify all critical business functions.
- Identify a recovery window (acceptable period of time from disaster to recovery) for each critical business function.
- Designate a disaster management team to be held responsible for adaption and implementation of plan.
- Develop a comprehensive internal and external communication plan that will function in a post-disaster environment.
- Concentrate on employee safety and restoration of critical business functions.
- Secure necessary supplies.
- Document your equipment, and write operational and shutdown procedures.
- Secure important corporate records.
- Communicate, review, and rehearse the plan. Make sure staff knows when they are expected to return, what their duties are, and where they will be working.

Address the Risks

We all need to address these possible risks before they occur. Snow and ice aren't a routine issue in Dallas, but remember Super Bowl 2011? The city saw two storms in a week that stopped city bus and light rail service completely and left up to two inches of ice on freeways. Plows and sanding trucks from all over the state were brought to the Metroplex to get people around. Many were without power.

Baylor Medical, where I worked at the time, has eight garages and more than 30 lots in Dallas. As a hospital, we needed to get staff in—everyone from doctors and nurses to nutrition and janitorial staff to laundry suppliers and food delivery trucks—so we were not able to wait for the ice to melt. The parking and transportation department kept shuttle buses running and provided transportation to selected doctors as needed. We had a plan in place to get the priority areas, such as the helipad, main streets, and garage entrances and exits, cleared before we worked on the perimeter parking lots.

Our plan worked, but it's a good idea to revisit regularly to ensure you've accounted for many scenarios:

- **The workplace.** If you experience a chemical spill, bomb threat, tornado, or earthquake, do you have another place people can work that is equipped to allow continued operations? Do your employees know if they are required to work under these conditions or if they should stay home? Are you going to continue to pay them, and how will you do that if your systems aren't functional or accessible? How

are you going to handle having people out helping their families instead of being at work? Do you have a policy on that?

- **Phones.** What if the lines are down and cell towers are out or jammed with the extra use? Remember Hurricane Sandy?
- **Data.** Are your computers backed up? Is that backup off site? What about your primary data—what happens if your cloud vendor is struck by a major event? Is each machine equipped with uninterruptible power or a generator?
- **The office.** If your roof is torn off and you experience substantial rain damage, what needs to be replaced to keep you operational? Simple things such as staplers, pens, and rubber bands can be quickly replaced, so having a list of items in advance will save much time and anguish. Don't forget nonstandard supplies, such as hand sanitizer or toilet paper.
- **Communicating with customers.** Are your mailing lists up to date? Do you have an accessible list to use to send a quick mailer to customers and suppliers letting them know what's going on? Don't forget your cleaning service and shipping vendor, either.
- **Insurance.** Do you know your agent's number? Your policy information? Can you report damage if you can't get to the office?

A standing line of credit might be a wise thing to have ahead of time to deal with all of the costs associated with the loss from the time the loss occurs until an insurance settlement occurs. Do you need to order a new batch of checks if what you have is buried under a collapsed roof or blown to the next state in a tornado?

Planning Ahead

Another thing to think about and make clear to everyone is who's included in key management personnel or chain of command. We all have that employee who says, "Bob is my boss. I report to Bob." What happens when Bob is not available to instruct the employee, or someone on the decision-making side is out of contact or unavailable?

Planning is continual and ongoing, and your plan must be taken seriously at all levels of the operation. Be sure, by the way, to check with your critical suppliers and customers and see what their plan is. You will want to have dedicated media spokespersons who are in contact with a senior manager. All of your equipment and major spare parts should be inventoried with age, make, model, and cost to replace. Test your safety equipment (smoke detectors, for example), and make sure your emergency equipment and supplies are well-stocked and up to date. Are there people who need assistance to get to cover or out of the building if disaster strikes? Who is responsible for them?



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Post-Disaster Priorities

- Assess the status of team members and reorganize as necessary.
- Establish lines of communication.
- Assess the immediate needs of the workforce.
- Assess the physical facility, equipment, and basic services.
- Deliver critical business activities.
- Contact suppliers and customers.
- Reconstruct or relocate operations.
- Instruct other offices.
- Develop a timetable for work resumption.
- Set up a supply warehouse if needed.

Everyone on your staff should know and understand what local, state, and federal warnings mean. Employees should be able to quickly secure their own areas and then check on others who might need assistance. Take the time to identify and stock employee survival needs, and do it before a storm is in the forecast. Know how to secure your data and access it when systems are down.


When Disaster Strikes

It's imperative to plan for a disaster before it happens, and that means educating and drilling with your staff. The first immediate action is to ensure everyone is accounted for. In case of a fire, for example, there should be a designated safe location where everyone should meet. The steps of the bank across the street are probably fine in this case, but that won't work during a tornado. And did you remember the person in the wheelchair? He needs to be able to get there.

Next, treat any injuries, contact outside emergency agencies as appropriate, and provide basic security; do you have a contract with a security company already in place for such emergencies? Make critical repairs, even if only temporary. Do you have a plan to board up windows? Can you get plywood? Even a bad summer storm takes some planning ahead.

Be prepared for people's first and secondary responses during an emergency. In the first minutes or hours, you can expect people to be irrational and not focused on work. Their priorities will likely be their own survival, the safety of their friends and family, their co-workers, their property, and their finances. Once those concerns fade a bit, you can expect denial and shock and guilt before recovery can begin; in a big disaster, there's a mourning process that will affect decisions.

As soon as possible, your established disaster management team should meet and try to determine the actual and potential damage to the company. An assessment of the status of each department from both a physical and workforce perspective should be performed.

This is a good start. Check with your legal, risk management, and insurance companies for more information and ideas. 



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