



EPHRATA FIRE DEPARTMENT

Resources for Business Owners

Disaster Preparedness for Businesses - Basic Steps

Why is this important?

- ▶ **Half** of all businesses forced to close due to disaster either never reopen or fail shortly thereafter.
- ▶ Businesses provide the economic base of most communities: community recovery hinges on businesses' ability to recover. Some businesses provide crucial services for communities affected by disaster.
- ▶ Businesses employ *people*. Although much of business preparedness and recovery is financial in scope and impact, some steps directly affect employee safety.
- ▶ If you work out of your home, business preparedness and personal preparedness reinforce each other.
- ▶ If your employees are prepared they not only will be more likely to survive a disaster, but will be more likely to be able to show up for work after a disaster strikes.
- ▶ Insurance won't cover all costs: most earthquake and flood insurance policies have at least a 10% deductible.
- ▶ You may be on your own for a few days; your employees, customers, and suppliers may not be able to get to you, and vice versa. How would you do business if your physical location were closed?

What are some basic steps I can take?

1. Perform a hazard vulnerability analysis:
 - ▶ What types of hazards are most common in your area?
 - ▶ What hazards carry the greatest potential for disaster, regardless of how commonly they occur?
 - ▶ What is *your* vulnerability to specific hazards?
 - ▶ What are *your suppliers'* vulnerabilities to specific hazards? Will you be able to stay open?
2. Develop emergency response plans for the workplace and ensure that all employees are familiar with them. Have periodic drills; even procedures as simple as self-protection during an earthquake ("Drop, Cover, and Hold on") or fire (building evacuation) can make a big difference.
 - ▶ Give duplicate keys and alarm codes to a trusted employee, as an emergency backup if you can't respond.
3. Keep contact information for key employees and customers with you. Provide copies to supervisory staff.
4. Provide a voicemail extension or external number on which you can remotely record messages for all employees (an emergency website is a great backup). Arrange for remotely programmable call forwarding for your main business line(s): if you can't get to the office, you can reprogram the phones to ring elsewhere.
5. Remember that your employees will want to tend to check on their families if an emergency occurs during the working day: make this planning priority and facilitate your employees' emergency communications.
6. Install emergency lighting that turns on when the power goes out.
7. Back up computer data frequently throughout the business day. Keep updated backups off site.
8. Use UL-listed surge protectors and battery backup systems. They will add protection for sensitive equipment and allow proper shutdown during a power failure.
9. Purchase a NOAA Weather Radio with a tone alert feature. Keep it on and when the warning signal sounds, listen for information about possible severe weather and protective actions to take.
10. Network with others who have or need to develop risk or contingency management plans; attend seminars and get information from local risk management associations or chapters.



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Disaster Preparedness for Businesses - Emergency Response

Why is this important?

1. Businesses employ *people*. Although much of business preparedness and recovery is financial in scope and impact, some steps directly affect employee safety.
2. Prompt response during an emergency, enhanced by workplace drills, can save lives and minimize downtime.
3. Effective response and evacuation plans, along with trained employees, make public safety (fire, police, EMS) responses more effective, enhance response personnel safety, and minimize disruption during response.

Seven habits of highly effective workplace emergency responses

1. Ensure EFD has *current* versions of the following. Include temporary updates (e.g., significant changes in hazardous inventory, transitional procedures, renovations, detours related to construction or repairs).
 - ▶ **24-hour emergency contacts:** *onsite during all hours that work is in progress, on call during off-hours*. Designated contacts should have ready access to the following items and be able to provide information to responders regarding onsite hazards and personnel accountability. Contacts should be notified as soon as a EFD is requested; ideally they should be able to meet incoming responders at a specified location outside hazard zones
 - ▶ **Keys and/or keypad combinations**, preferably in a controlled-access keybox (Knox Box) at the entrance
 - ▶ **Building plans**, including layout, mechanical systems, fire protection systems and alarm panels, alarm and sprinkler system maintenance contacts, emergency egress, and evacuation areas
 - ▶ **Hazardous materials inventories**, including substance identification, amounts, locations, and safety/ control features
 - ▶ **Any other onsite hazard inventories** (e.g., high- or low-pressure systems, thermal hazards, noise hazards), along with emergency control features (e.g., shutoffs)
 - ▶ **A copy of your internal emergency response plan**
2. Ensure that all employees are familiar with emergency response plans and are familiar with their specific emergency roles and responsibilities. Have periodic training and drills. Participate in regional emergency response exercises.
3. If your onsite hazards are significant or you have a large or complex facility, train your response personnel in the Incident Command System. This will allow internal and external responders to be working within the same incident management framework. Establish an onsite command post or ensure that internal command staff report to EFD's command post when it is established.
4. Invite EFD to observe and participate in emergency response drills. This will help familiarize responders with site layout, hazards, personnel, staging areas, etc. *There is no substitute for face-to-face coordination before an incident occurs.*
5. Develop and practice an onsite system for evacuation and rapid and accurate accounting for all personnel during an emergency; this should include an "all-clear" signal *without which employees do not re-enter*. This allows employees needing immediate assistance to receive it and can prevent unnecessary rescue attempts.
6. Keep emergency vehicle routes and access to fire protection equipment (Knox Boxes, sprinkler systems, fire department connections) clear and well marked.
7. Establish protocols for managing information release to the media on short notice. Have at least one employee available onsite (on-call during off-hours) who can respond to media requests and work with EFD's public information officers to provide accurate, appropriate information during emergencies.