

Are you ready for the hurricane season?

Donna Little, Director of the Louisiana Small Business Development Center at McNeese

Losing your small business to a hurricane is a very fearful reality for business owners in Southwest Louisiana. All it takes is one storm in the wrong spot to destroy what you've spent years building.

Your evacuation journey to Shreveport or Dallas will be less stressful if you know you have taken steps to protect your business investment. Spend a few hours to get ready.

First step is to review your insurance needs and policies, so you are sure you know what is covered. If you have added equipment or inventory, make sure the changes are reflected, so you will have full coverage. Call your insurance agent today and make an appointment, put it on the calendar, so you will be committed to taking care of this important step.

Do you have a complete and current list of your employees and associates with contact info? Schedule a staff meeting, order pizza and update the contact numbers. Discuss possible evacuation plans, so everyone can stay in touch in case the worst happens. And make sure everyone can access the information in case a storm moves quickly and catches you away from the office.

While you are meeting with your employees, take a look around your office or shop and discuss how you would secure the premises and equipment. Will you cover the computers with tarps? Will each of you drive a company truck when you evacuate?

A crucial aspect of staying in business following a hurricane is communicating with your suppliers and your customers. If you have a website, make sure that you can update it to tell your customers when you plan to open again. Facebook can be an easy way to stay in touch.

Your company data can be almost as valuable as your inventory. If you lose your accounting information, you will spend weeks trying to recreate invoices for your clients. If you evacuate, you will want to talk to your vendors, so they will understand your situation. Scan important documents so you will have electronic versions available. Talk to your IT professional today about backing up your data on a regular basis. This could be a good time to investigate storing your information in the cloud.

Another tool to help your small business be ready for an emergency is to sign up for the Louisiana Small Business Development Center's statewide mobile emergency alert system that delivers immediate updates via SMS text messaging. By texting READY to (318) 769-9921, small businesses will receive information on where to find help if needed after a local or regional emergency. A business can customize the subscription to receive only alerts pertaining to its specific geographic area within the state.

We all hope that we don't have a hurricane, but it is wise to be ready, just in case. Your family is your first priority, but making sure your business can continue is vital.