

# Prepare for the Unexpected

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Decision making in a crisis rarely yields the most effective solutions. If the recent storm caught you unprepared, consider that while inconvenient and disruptive, serious weather events provide an excellent time to work on your emergency planning.

During a crisis, communication is vital. A company's website and other social media channels are the face of the company to the world. Even though the company may be closed, the Internet is still open. It is important to use the available media channels to let the public know whether you are open or closed, if customers can expect delays in shipment, and how to contact the company for emergencies during the storm. Don't forget to update the company's voicemail with a brief status of the business and whether or not voicemail will be checked.

Communication with employees in a timely manner is not only critical to the operation of the business, but also sends signals to employees about their value to the business and the firm's commitment to their safety. This is an excellent opportunity to update contact information with all employees for future events.

Although many businesses close during a severe weather event, not everyone shuts down and goes home. Check the emergency supply cabinet to provide essentials for staff members who stay on-site. Water, one gallon per person per day, is recommended by FEMA as is a 3-day supply of non-perishable food and don't forget the can opener. Also consider the need for personal hygiene needs along with a flashlight, radio, and extra batteries. It is a good idea to have some cash on hand as well. In our modern society, debit and credit cards are common place. However, when the power goes out and the communication lines go down, cash may be the only means at your disposal to purchase essential goods or services.

Make sure your computer data backup is current and accessible. During an extended outage you might need to relocate your business in order to get started again. Having a usable backup will make that process much smoother and complete. Remember too that not all data is computer based. Be sure you have a way to retrieve paper based files, checks, and work in progress if you must relocate.

Examine your insurance policies and be sure you understand what is covered. For example, do you have business interruption insurance and do you know what will trigger the coverage to start and end. You should know what your deductible is and how it will be applied when you have a claim. If you have coinsurance, how does it work? You should also know what types of losses are excluded under your policy. Know also your policy limits and how they apply. Certainly, this is not an exhaustive list of the questions you should consider. Insurance coverage can be a complex topic which should be reviewed with your agent on a regular basis.

Do you have a written plan for how to recover from this disaster or is it all stored as institutional knowledge in the recesses of your memory? Take the time to organize your thoughts, assess the process of recovering from events which stop your business, and put them down in an organized written document. Your customers, employees, and vendors are counting on you to keep the doors open when a disaster strikes. Make it a priority to do so.

The Louisiana Small Business Development Center has been helping entrepreneur and small business owners for over 30 years. For no-cost assistance with your business need, contact us at (337) 324-1227 to set up an appointment.