

Promoting Preparedness in the Private Sector

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Regional Business Preparedness Campaign

Various surveys and reports paint a sobering picture of the ability of small- to medium-sized businesses to survive a disaster. One year after the devastating 2010 floods in Nashville, Tenn., the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce estimated that more than 15% of affected businesses remain closed, with a loss of more than 1,500 jobs. The businesses that did reopen are operating at two-thirds of their pre-flood levels. Total losses suffered by area businesses exceeded \$300 million.

Community Recovery Affected by Business Resiliency

While regulations such as HIPPA and Sarbanes-Oxley require some businesses to develop business continuity (BC) plans, most businesses have no such requirement. In fact, the majority of businesses have no plan at all. Yet the ability of a community to recover from a disaster is based, in part, on the resiliency of the area businesses. After the Nashville flood, many businesses reported that developing BC plans were at the top of their to-do list, but that is too late for the hundreds of businesses that were not able to reopen. Therefore, educating businesses on the need for continuity planning should be an important part of emergency management (EM) preparedness activities.

Developing Regional Business Preparedness Campaign

In 2011, the Business, Industry and Infrastructure Subcommittee of the South Central Pennsylvania Task Force joined with Millersville University's Center for Disaster Research and Education to develop a Regional Business Preparedness Campaign. The goal of the campaign is to increase preparedness

activities for businesses in the task force's eight-county area.

■ **First Phase.** For the first phase of the campaign, five newsletters were developed with contributions by subject-matter experts from within the region. The goal was to increase awareness within the business community of the need for BC planning. The newsletter topics included: the need for BC planning; information system vulnerabilities; situational awareness for businesses; BC plan development basics; and real world examples of businesses responding to disasters. Four of the five newsletters were distributed in September, which was National Preparedness Month.

Distribution of the newsletters was achieved by partnering with the six major Chambers of Commerce in the region. This provided the campaign with access to more than 8,000 member businesses. The Chambers posted the newsletters on their websites or distributed the newsletters by e-mail. As a result, there was no cost to develop or distribute the newsletters. The campaign was able to reach a significant number of businesses in the region, and the Chambers were able to provide a value-added service to their members: a win-win.

■ **Second Phase.** For the second phase of the campaign, a one-day business continuity conference was developed. The goal of the conference was to build upon the awareness phase and begin to assist businesses with starting the BC planning process. The conference was geared mainly toward businesses new to BC planning.

Ten separate sessions were developed, including: BC plan development and testing; recovery insurance; crisis communications; cyber security; data backups; and emergency response planning. The

presenters for each session were recruited from subject-matter experts within the region, and each offered their services at no charge.

Several vendors were also invited to attend the conference, with the goal of matching business BC needs with available resources. The employer of each presenter was also given the option to attend as a vendor. The costs for the conference were limited to meeting space rental, handout duplication, and lunch. There was no cost for businesses to attend the conference this year.

More than 100 business leaders, representing small, medium and large companies from the region, attended the conference in November. As a result of the extremely positive feedback, the campaign will continue as an annual feature, with three newsletters each year and an annual BC conference with a variety of topics.

Conclusion

Ensuring the continued operation of a business after a disaster requires more than just business insurance; it requires BC planning before a disaster strikes. While most EM preparedness activities focus on residents, business needs cannot be overlooked. The basic format presented here serves as a template that EM planners in other communities can implement. Improving the ability of businesses to survive a disaster allows businesses to play an important role in the recovery of the community as a whole.

