



Business Continuity Awareness Week

June 21 - 27 is Business Continuity Awareness Week in the U.S. Is your business prepared to deal with a local, regional or even national disaster? As we deal with the hustle and bustle of our daily responsibilities, it is often easy to overlook the potential risks our business face that could cause us to shut our doors, resulting in lost income or even permanent closure. We often think of our only threats for closure being large natural disasters of Hurricane Katrina proportion - and then it seems as if something that vast only happens on the news and would never actually happen to US. But did you know that even a regional power outage could force your business to close if you don't have a plan in place that addresses how you'll continue working without your electronics and lights? Or, if one of your primary suppliers is suddenly unavailable and can't deliver the goods you depend on to service your customers, will those customers be willing to wait on you or move to your competition? What if you suddenly lost a key employee or didn't have access to critical information and data?

There are other benefits to business continuity planning besides just averting a disaster. Planning ahead requires you to take a good look at your operations. You're likely to find some areas you can streamline; for example, while reviewing your critical business functions, you may find that a project has to go through several hands before it is finalized, when one or two might suffice. Or, you may find that only one person knows how to perform a specific function that requires timely attention, and choose to train someone as an alternate in the event the primary person is unavailable.

Are you convinced? Before you start, you need to identify your risks - whether tornadoes, floods, hurricanes, freezing weather, earthquakes, or the “smaller” problems such as loss of basic utilities - and what you can do to protect yourself, your business, and your property. Then, you need to think about what you must do to assure your business' survival and ongoing viability, i.e. what is most critical and time-sensitive.

Now, you are ready to focus on the construction of your business continuity plan. Here are the main steps:

First, record basic information:

1. Employees, including owners
2. Suppliers and vendors
3. Key contacts

Next, identify:

4. Critical business functions (What is most important to do to maintain an income stream; to keep your competitive advantage and reputation; and to meet your legal, regulatory, financial or

contractual obligations?)

5. Possible alternate locations (Where could your business resume operations if you could not work from your existing location?)

Then list what you would need to fulfill your critical business functions at that alternate location:

6. Vital records
7. Critical telephone numbers
8. Critical supplies
9. Equipment, machinery, and vehicles

Identify the items your workers will need:

10. Computer equipment and software
11. Voice and data communications
12. Miscellaneous resources such as office supplies

Once your plan is complete, store it in paper and online copies. Some people keep an extra encrypted backup copy on a computer flash drive on a key chain. Experts recommend updating the plan at least once a year, perhaps on an anniversary date or before storm season.

As a result of your planning process, you may decide to take some immediate steps to reduce the potential for damage from the risks you have identified, i.e .your vulnerability. You may want to install storm shutters, buy flood insurance, stock up on water,purchase a generator,or regularly back up critical information and data,for examples.

Resolve to start planning now, because later may be too late?

