

# BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLAN

DO YOU HAVE ONE FOR WHEN A CRISIS OR NATURAL DISASTER STRIKES? By Lunell Haight and Jim Barry

**O**UTSIDE OF A MOVIE THEATER, HOW MUCH THOUGHT HAVE YOU GIVEN TO EARTHQUAKES, volcanoes, floods and wind here in Spokane? This time of year, the impact of snow, ice and other weather conditions can easily disrupt our normal business routines – though hopefully on a minor scale.

Aside from a power outage, bad weather and other events can severely cripple a company's operating procedures. Instead of chanting the "it will never happen to me" mantra, be prepared for anything. A number of local businesses have successfully weathered a variety of situations that would've crippled or permanently sidelined them had they not been so well prepared.

Remember what your business did after the ice storm of 1996? Were you desperately looking for a generator for your home or office? Many Spokaneites may also remember the days after Mount St. Helens erupted in 1980 – searching for facemasks and air filters while unable to drive our cars.

Balancing how you deal with unexpected major events and the tremendous impact they have, along with being fully prepared for them, is the difference between whether or not your business makes it through successfully.

Businesses are also vulnerable to people-related disruptions, whether it's from a flu outbreak or terrorism. (Remember all those travelers who couldn't return to work the days after 9/11?) When a business owner or a key manager is sidelined for a prolonged period of time, it's even worse.

Increasingly, employees are also impacted by health crises, drug/alcohol use or domestic violence situations. These, too, affect businesses. In these high stress times, it's worth talking about what to do when disruptive customers or family members interfere with work.

Without a plan, it isn't unusual for six or seven people to cluster around and, in the interest of being helpful, actually add to the confusion and chaos.

And what about accidents? Even minor ones require immediate attention and damage control. More than one

local company has had to contact customers because confidential data was lost or fire shut down a site. Although rare and very tragic, accidental death can occur – vehicles, forklifts and chemical releases have all killed employees in this region.

Within the last year, an otherwise healthy local business owner died unexpectedly of a heart attack. Despite the great loss, the company is doing well and employees and customers are secure. All because five years ago the owner developed a strategic plan and included his top managers in the implementation. In addition to a designated and trained "second-in-command," each key position person knew the plan and what was required to move forward. Because of a well-developed pre-planned network, customers and employees were contacted, reassured and told what they could expect in the upcoming weeks and months following the tragedy.

Another example concerns a chemical company. Their plan included specific internal steps when deaths occurred due to an accident, as well as public meetings to explain to nervous and angry neighboring citizens what happened and what was going to be done about it.

Other companies who haven't planned potential "worse-case scenarios" have had to shut their doors, losing customers and employees, while they figured out the next step. This doesn't have to happen.

## STEP 1: BRAINSTORM SCENARIOS

It's better to plan in comfort rather than in crisis. So, pick a time when you can really focus on this task without the pressure of daily business demands, or the impeding stress of a potential crisis, knowing that for now the office lights are still on and the accounts receivables are in a tidy bank account. Once you're ready, list all the possibilities for "What Could Go Wrong." This vital step in creating a business continuity plan can be broken down into three scenario groups: nature, people and accidents. For each one, list specific possible impacts.

## STEP 2: MAKE A LIST OF ACTIONS

Create an action plan of contact that can be applied to each crisis scenario should it actually occur. Include a list of tasks and the necessary supplies, tools and personnel to accomplish it. Check with your business office's security system, technology support and insurance company to be sure you are clear about their responsibilities when your business functions are disrupted. Solicit input from other key players within your organization to help you.

## STEP 3: SEEK FEEDBACK AND DISCUSS

Discuss your plans and ideas with your management team and/or other key personnel and be open to their feedback. Be sure everyone present is able to focus on this important task and give it the mental attention it deserves.

Listen to what everyone has to say. Take notes. Let everyone know how important their input and suggestions are, not only for the good of the company's future, but also to create the best possible outcome should a future crisis or tragedy occur.

After this step, your plans may require substantial revisions and possibly another meeting.

## STEP 4: MAKE ARRANGEMENTS

After a plan is agreed upon, arrange to secure any items you may need, as well as any necessary off-site storage and access. Clearly communicate the plan to all employees and make sure they understand it. Give managers a printed copy to keep in a secure place at their homes or in their traveling briefcases.

## Hazard Scoring

Events most likely to occur	Likelihood factor: 0 (low) - 3 (high)
Winter Storm	2.172
Power Failure	1.828
Wildfire	1.793
Earthquake	1.759
Urban Fire	1.690
Civil Disorder	1.414
Transportation (Air or Rail)	1.310
Drought	1.207
Flood	1.172
Terrorism	1.138
HAZ Facility	1.103
Tornado	0.966
HAZ Transportation	0.966
Dam Failure	0.862
Volcano	0.759
Radiological - Facility	0.724
Subsidence	0.690
Landslide	0.483
Radiological - Transportation	0.345
Avalanche	0.345

Source: SPOKANE CITY-COUNTY DISASTER COMMITTEE, 2002.

### Helpful Websites:

- [ready.gov](http://ready.gov) – Homeland Security Ready Campaign
- [srhd.org](http://srhd.org) – Spokane Regional Health District
- [doh.wa.gov/panflu](http://doh.wa.gov/panflu) – Wash. State Dept. of Health
- [who.int](http://who.int) – World Health Organization
- [pandemicflu.gov](http://pandemicflu.gov) – U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services

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## Here's a checklist to help get you started on your business continuity plan:

### DO YOU . . .

- have a phone tree list for all employees on-site, as well as for those off-site?
- know when to tell employees not to come to work?
- know what to do if there's a disaster and you have people at work (including customers) who also care for family members who are in another location?
- have emergency supplies on hand?
- know how your vital records (including customer lists) are stored, and more than one way to access them?
- know who covers for positions if they are vacated?
- have a "critical work" list for each position so the essentials can be completed?
- have a plan to help employees be prepared at home? (Three Days, Three Ways)
- know what a succession plan is? If you don't already have one, have you considered developing one?
- receive the "Alliance for Business Continuity & Disaster Preparedness" newsletter? Sign up for it at [preparespokane.com](http://preparespokane.com).