

Contingency Planning

Measures to aid recovery from disaster

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*Supporting guidance for the new BSRIA publication:
Designing Against Terrorism*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Disasters can come in many forms and at any time. Nevertheless it is possible for an organisation to make itself more resilient to such events.

How much preparation is made depends on factors such as the nature of the organisation, the cost of downtime and the estimated likelihood of any disaster.

The first step any organisation can take is to examine its emergency procedures in the event of the fire alarm being activated. Apart from the prime requirement to save lives emergency procedures can also minimise the direct effects of a disaster. It is recommended that an emergency committee should be created which would be activated when required to take control and manage a disastrous situation.

Recovery of an organisation is specific to its type, the financial climate at the time and the extent of the damage. Recovery is not dealt with in this guidance except to outline some aspects.

The second step would be to estimate how vulnerable the organisation is to any disaster in terms of loss of personnel, loss of information and the loss of premises and their contents. It would also examine the efficiency of any back-up procedures.

Finally an estimate could be made of the likelihood of any disaster occurring and these procedures made into an annual event to keep their currency.

Preparation for disaster can create an organisation, intrinsically less vulnerable to disaster. It may also produce a more efficient organisation benefiting from a fresh examination of all its operations.

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I INTRODUCTION

The aim of this Technical Note is to identify the necessary measures to minimise the impact of a disaster on an organisation. It also considers what should be in place to enable management to react as swiftly and effectively as possible to any emergency without incurring excessive cost in relation to the risk.

There has always been an interest in contingency planning because buildings and their services and personnel are frequently being stricken by various disasters. Natural disasters include fire, floods, high winds, earthquakes, medical emergency and lightning. Man-made disasters include bombs, gas explosions, aeroplane crashes, chemical or bio-hazard spillage, major plant or system failures, power failure, communications failure, vandalism by intruders and arson.

The recent terrorist attack on the World Trade Center which demolished the Twin Towers and removed the premises of 616 businesses (and, in some cases, their entire staff,) has raised awareness of the dangers. The attack underlined the fact that such suicide bombing is an international problem. It is not surprising that contingency planning is now top of the international agenda.

One approach for high profile buildings is to prepare them and their services for some level of perceived terrorist attack^[1]. The problem with this approach is the correct identification of the type of attack and the probable high cost of making adequate provision.

But what is contingency planning? Contingency planning concerns itself with unexpected emergency. If a company has in place a positive 'safety culture', day-by-day safety management and safety awareness among all levels of staff, this in itself may reduce the probability of an emergency arising. A disaster strikes with little or no warning, so a contingency plan's first priority is to create a business without 'too many eggs in one basket'. Second, its role is to create an organisation-in-waiting which can move in to manage a situation when an emergency is declared.

2 RISK ANALYSIS

Risk is the chance or possibility of danger, commercial loss or other losses. A measure of risk is the product of the effect of the hazard and the chance of the hazard occurring. Disaster provision is concerned with a hazard which is assumed to have a very damaging effect (that is assumed!) but which has little chance of occurring.

In this situation it is the chance of occurrence, which is the unknown factor. To determine the chance of occurrence a broad look has to be taken at what the organisation does, where the organisation is and who are the neighbours.

Organisation activities

While the products of an organisation may be harmless in themselves they may be useful in non-harmless activities. The products of an organisation may even be on some countries' banned list for strategic reasons. Who are the customers and what are their activities? Are the activities likely to be the target of protesters? An in-depth analysis of these questions is not necessarily required: a quick look for obvious problems may be sufficient.

Location

Geographical location will determine the risk of flooding, earthquakes and other natural phenomena. Is the organisation located on a flight path of an airport or adjacent to a busy road that is used to transport hazardous materials?

Neighbours

Experience with bombs that devastate city centers reveals that the physical neighbourhood governs the clear distance from a blast considered to be risky. Neighbours' activities should be identified and considered as far as possible for risk elements. Details are usually unavailable, but some information can be obtained from names and listings in trade directories.

One risk, which should be considered, is medical emergency. This would involve sudden severe sickness or demise of one or more key personnel. Profiling the age or medical records of key personnel gives some idea of natural events. The disasters might be a car crash or other transport accident, or food poisoning at a dinner. The activities of key personnel requiring considerable travel should be examined to reduce risk. The crucial question is, how vulnerable is the organisation to having one or more persons missing?

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