

## **Hurricane!**

### **Disaster and Emergency Response Planning for State Agencies**

Last year's hurricane season was one of the most active seasons in Florida's history. After having experienced the events of last year, the importance of having a viable agency disaster plan cannot be overstated. This is an excellent time to examine your agency's disaster plan.

Agencies conduct disaster planning to accomplish three major goals:

1. To protect lives and minimize property losses;
2. To provide for the rapid resumption of operations and services;
3. To ensure that adequate records and documentation is maintained to aid in post-disaster cost recovery activities.

For natural disasters such as hurricanes, agencies typically use four loss control strategies in their overall planning and response:

1. Mitigation
2. Preparation
3. Response
4. Recovery

The first two strategies, mitigation and planning, occur before the disaster occurs. The second two strategies, response and recovery, occur after the disaster has occurred. A comprehensive disaster plan will incorporate all of these strategies.

#### **Mitigation**

Hazard mitigation concentrates on long-term methods to reduce the effects of a hazard by improving the agency's ability to withstand future hazards. In order to mitigate hazards effectively, an agency should address mitigation measures through planning, policy making, and implementation. Mitigation may be accomplished through a variety of means. Because most natural disasters are localized, mitigation may be accomplished by analyzing the areas that a particular hazard may occur in, and then either not occupying those areas (loss avoidance) or by implementing measures to counteract the effects of the hazard, such as installing hurricane shutters on the windows of buildings in coastal areas.

The risk management concepts of segregation and duplication are effective ways to implement mitigation in your agency's disaster plan. With segregation, an agency's business units are not housed in a single facility, so that the loss of one facility will not cause all of the agency's services to be discontinued. With duplication, the agency has duplicate facilities spread over an area so that services may be continued even if some of the facilities are destroyed. Essential business records and files may also be duplicated and stored in separate locations so that the agency can continue operations in the event that the original records are damaged or destroyed.

## Preparedness

Preparedness concerns the activities an agency takes prior to the disaster's occurrence to minimize the potential losses the agency may incur, and to minimize the time required resume the agency's core operations or services. Depending on the severity of the event and the time available before it's occurrence, an agency may take several actions to prepare for the event, such as:

- Canceling leave of essential personnel and staff assigned emergency duties
- Temporarily dismissing essential personnel and emergency staff to allow them time to make personal preparations for their families and personal property
- Dismiss all non-essential staff
- Ensure that all affected facilities are locked or otherwise secured
- Have secure, waterproof storage for all essential files and records
- Ensure that off-site duplicates of all essential files and records are up to date
- Tying down or otherwise securing items that may be blown by high winds
- Installing hurricane shutters or boarding up windows and glass doors. A less preferred alternative is to tape windows in a crisscross pattern.
- Place papers, drawings, etc. inside desks instead of leaving them on desktops
- Wrapping office equipment in plastic to protect against moisture
- Ensuring that all vehicles are fully fueled, serviced and operational
- Activating sheltering and feeding facilities for emergency personnel
- Turning off air conditioners, disconnecting electrical equipment, and turning off lights in evacuated facilities
- Taking elevators out of service and parking them in the center of the building before the onset of hurricane force winds
- Establishing and pre-stocking logistical supply points with fuel, food, water, first aid supplies, spare parts, and maintenance teams

The above actions should be part of the agency's **emergency response plan**. The emergency response plan is the heart of an agency's preparations for a hurricane or other disaster, and is unique to the agency, due to the specialized functions the agency must perform. The plan should be written by a group representative of all parts of the agency, rather than an individual, and should be reviewed and approved by the agency's senior management. While every agency's plan is unique, all emergency response plans should address the following areas:

- Who will be in charge during the emergency
- Identify essential personnel, equipment and facilities, and actions to be taken based on the type of emergency
- How and when essential personnel will be notified of the pending disaster, and who will notify those personnel
- Ensure that all personnel understand their responsibilities and their decision-making authority regarding preventive measures and recovery activities
- Have written plans in a standard format that detail emergency response procedures, to include evacuation plans and recovery plans
- Identify emergency equipment available at the facility level

- Allow for training of personnel in the plan, to include methods and schedules for conducting drills and other exercises
- Minimize the economic effects of the disaster
- Provide for a rapid and smooth restoration of service
- Have plans specific to individual buildings and facilities
- Provide for the periodic review and update of the emergency response plan at least annually

Once a plan has been written, it should be validated by the use of desk checks, walk throughs, and simulations. Desk checks may include a review of checklists for supplies, telephone calling trees, and other procedural items to ensure that they are current or in need of revision. Walk-throughs can be used to determine if there are any gaps in the plan, and if the plan still makes sense. The walk-through is conducted by plan members, and focuses on specific parts of the plan. Simulations should be geared to each section of the plan, such as disaster notification, emergency response, command and control, and recovery. Simulations are the best way to test the effectiveness of the agency's emergency response plan.

### **Response**

Emergency response includes all actions taken immediately after an emergency is detected and that are intended to minimize damage and speed the recovery from the emergency. Some general principles apply to all emergency response activities:

- Each person's first responsibility is to maintain their own safety- only then can they help others.
- Everyone is responsible for cooperating in carrying out the plan.
- Plans should incorporate the simplest and safest options for the safety of the greatest numbers of people.
- Emergency responders, such as the fire department, take charge upon their arrival.
- Physical force should never be used to evacuate or restrain people from entry.
- Consent should not be given to plans or proposed actions that may endanger lives.
- The plan's activation should be commensurate with the severity and type of the impending threat- it may not be necessary to implement all portions of the emergency response plan.
- If activated, the **emergency operations center (EOC)** should provide command and control, logistical and operational resources related to response and recovery.
- Alert and notification activities should be formalized, and should have at least two means of notification.
- There should be at least two means of communications, and the plan should address potential disruptions, such as the loss of power or telephone lines.
- Media relations or other public information activities should be an integral part of the plan
- If evacuation of a facility is necessary, after the evacuation is effected, an evacuation sweep should be conducted for missed occupants. The sweep should start farthest away from and work towards exits. Floor plans should be used to

ensure that all rooms have been checked, with each room marked off when checked. Once the sweep has been finished, the building must be locked or secured to prevent reentry.

- Primary and alternate evacuation routes must be determined for each building, and an assembly area must be defined that offers protection according to the type of disaster that is faced. Once all staff are evacuated to the assembly area, a roll call should be performed to ensure that all staff are present or accounted for.
- Emergency vehicles and vehicles intended for use as transports should be protected from damage and pre-positioned as necessary.
- Sufficient staff should be trained in first aid procedures.
- Search and rescue operations should be conducted by trained personnel, and should be a top priority in the plan.
- Physical security procedures should be in place to protect staff and property from unforeseen dangers.
- Public utilities and health care facilities should be identified and integrated into the plan.

## **Recovery**

Recovery activities are generally divided into short-term and long-term categories. Recovery typically begins immediately after a reasonable level of order and safety is attained. Short-term recovery activities focus on providing immediate operating capabilities for essential activities until full operations can be resumed, and on providing for temporary measures to protect people and property from further damage, and usually take place in the hours or days immediately after an emergency. Long-term recovery activities focus on the overall restoration of operations for the agency, and usually take place weeks or months after the emergency occurs. Long-term recovery also includes cost recovery when applicable- several federal agencies, such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) or the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), may provide funds to aid in disaster recovery. The aid available from these agencies is passed through the Department of Community Affairs to agencies who request assistance from the federal agencies, and who are approved for assistance.

When an agency applies for federal public assistance, inspectors assess all damage and review all documentation associated with the request for assistance. The following actions are a guide to prepare for those inspections and reviews:

- Prepare a list of all facilities damaged as a direct result of the disaster, including those where repairs have already been performed. (Indicate what work has been completed and what work has not been completed.)
- Mark the location of each damage site on a suitable map.
- Have pictures, sketches, or drawings of each site available for inspectors to keep- be sure to obtain pictures BEFORE repairs begin, if possible, and after repairs have been completed.
- Compile an itemized list of repair costs, segregated by labor costs (including fringe benefits,) materials costs, and equipment costs, for each location where work has been done. Be sure to include the cost of emergency preventative

measures, as well as permanent restorative work. Emergency preventative measures should be kept on a separate list than restorative work.

- Provide vehicle usage logs for equipment and vehicles using the categories and descriptions used in the current FEMA Schedule on Equipment Rates.
- Provide policy information on any insurance coverage in effect, and any insurance proceeds received or expected.
- List any equipment, materials, or inventory lost in the disaster. Provide any substantiating records, such as inventory records, pictures of rooms showing the equipment in place, and bids, purchase orders, or invoices that provide loss values or replacement costs.
- Ensure that a knowledgeable person such as an engineer or public works superintendent accompanies the survey team. This person should have knowledge of work already done, work remaining to be done, and all damaged facilities needing work.

### **Summary**

Anticipating and planning for hurricanes and other disasters are vital first steps in being prepared for an event. Before an emergency occurs, mitigation may reduce the potential for damage by improving an agency's ability to withstand damages through the use of methods such as segregation or duplication. Preparedness can minimize the losses an agency may incur and the time required to resume key operations, primarily through the development and implementation of the agency's emergency response plan. Once an emergency is detected, responses to the emergency according to the agency's emergency response plan are implemented to protect lives and minimize losses. After the emergency has passed, recovery activities are initiated to resume operations and services, and to recover the costs associated with the emergency.

Additional information regarding disaster and emergency response planning are available at the following web sites:

American Red Cross: [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)

National Weather Service: [www.nws.noaa.gov](http://www.nws.noaa.gov)

Federal Emergency Management Agency: [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov)

Florida Division of Emergency Management: [www.floridadisaster.org](http://www.floridadisaster.org)

The staff here at Risk Management wishes you success in your disaster planning process. If you should have any questions regarding this article, please contact the Risk Services section at 850-413-3121, or Suncom 293-3121.