



HOW CAN WE BE BETTER PREPARED FOR THE NEXT COVID-19 SCENARIO?

An All-Hazards Approach to Building Resilient Organizations and Operations

By: Jay Appleton, PE, NJCEM, CHC

As I write this, it's the end of April 2020, and we are about 50 days into the State of Emergency declared by Governor Phil Murphy in response to the Coronavirus, a pandemic that is radically changing the way that we conduct virtually every aspect of our lives. Hardly anyone could have imagined an event like this that would so significantly affect the ways that we work, play, learn, worship, and even eat. In addition to the tragic loss of life resulting from the virus, businesses have shut down, many have lost their jobs, schools are closed, and masks are the new fashion statement. As we're (hopefully) on the downside of the pandemic impact curve, it's time to think about recovery and, most importantly, strategies and planning to make sure we're more prepared for another event of this magnitude. Here are answers to five questions we can ask ourselves to guide effective planning for response to, and recovery from, catastrophic events that disrupt our businesses.

How Can We Know What to Plan For?

An "all-hazards" approach to planning accounts for natural (e.g., hurricane, earthquake), technological (e.g., fire, utility interruption), and human (e.g., active shooter, cyber-crime) hazards. A risk assessment process that identifies and ranks threats, vulnerabilities and consequences that are relevant to a specific organization and/or location will facilitate an efficient planning approach.

What Should We Do to Prepare?

When specific threats and vulnerabilities are identified by the risk assessment process, mitigation measures can be developed to reduce or eliminate the potential consequences of a disruptive event. For example, if the risk assessment notes that frequent local power outages interfere with critical business operations, the installation of an emergency generator would be an appropriate mitigation measure.

Is Our Facility Good Enough?

It is critically important to understand the status of the buildings and infrastructure that support core business operations. The best way to document facility condition and thus plan mitigation of deficiencies is to have a comprehensive facility assessment conducted and documented by qualified professionals. Such an assessment would evaluate site conditions, building envelope, structural condition, building systems such as HVAC, plumbing, and electrical, as well as life-safety and overall facility security.

Will We Be Able to Survive Through and Past A Disaster?

Preparation of a thoughtfully crafted Emergency Operations Plan that is informed by a comprehensive threat/vulnerability assessment will enhance the probability that an organization will respond effectively to most disasters, thus preserving life, and minimizing physical damage. Likewise, a Continuity of Operations Plan that makes provision for alternative workplaces and teleworking, technology redundancy, leadership succession, supply chain integrity, protection of vital records, and reconstitution following the disruption will give an organization the best possible chance to continue operations through most disaster scenarios.

Who Should Be Involved In Planning?

A planning team should include representation from organization leadership, and should have a seat at the table for key people from every operating department within the organization including finance, facilities, technology, and security.

One of the most important lessons we've learned so far from the COVID-19 pandemic is the need for self-sufficiency at every level – from states to counties to municipalities. This doctrine extends to corporate, healthcare, educational, and senior living organizations. For a variety of reasons, we can't always count on getting the help we need from the next rung up the ladder. Smart planning, training, and exercising the plan will build resilience and make a positive difference, no matter what we need to deal with next.

This article originally appeared in The Chronicle, a Southern New Jersey Development Council publication, June 2020.



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