



## In the Midst of Hurricane Season – Is Your Business Ready?

As those of us located in Houston know too well - coastal areas bordering the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Ocean are all vulnerable to hurricanes. The official hurricane season for the United States is June 1 through November 30, and some research predicts the 2021 hurricane season to be an “above average” season for hurricanes with the potential for 17 named storms and as many as 8 hurricanes.

That being said, is your business prepared? Below are some considerations as to whether your business and its people are prepared to weather the storms.

### Preparedness Planning

Is there a plan in place company-wide to protect your people, physical locations, and other assets? Assessing the needs of your company by evaluating needs of people, physical location, and key suppliers is the necessary first step. Then using that assessment, create a specific plan to address measures needed year round, immediately before the storm, and after.

**People** First and foremost think about your people. An added layer to personnel concerns is that we are mid-pandemic and dealing with the surge of the delta variant, which means many employees are working remote, from home, or on flexible schedule. Home technology (power and internet) may be the first impacted by high winds and storm surge. Make sure there is an updated employee list with cell phone numbers. Consider implementing an emergency communication system to send out notifications to employees. Determine whether additional technology or software is necessary. There are many applications available for cell phones and wireless devices that allow an employer to push out notifications and enable two-way communication with your employees throughout an emergency. Further, encourage your employees to have their own personal hurricane preparedness plan at home.

**Physical Location** Damage to the physical location of your business can be devastating. Damage to buildings, equipment, and loss of critical data can sabotage an otherwise thriving business. Here are a few key assessments:

- How is your data handled? Experts recommend backing up data to a remote location and/or on a cloud-based system to ensure critical data is not lost. At the very least, back-up all data on-site before a storm.
- Is your physical location protected from damage?

- Proper maintenance and repairs to your building throughout the year can assist with preparation.
  - Inspect emergency equipment and clean debris away from building. Consider uninterruptible power supplies (generators and batteries), but test them throughout hurricane season to ensure they are working when needed. Also, consider backup water supplies and gasoline-powered pumps to remove floodwaters.
  - In the days before a storm consider moving files away from windows, remove from the first floor anything that could be ruined by first floor flooding, consider securing doors, and boarding windows as may be appropriate.
  - **Note: For those in construction, there should be a completely separate plan and checklist for securing in-progress jobsites and equipment.**
- What is your plan to protect other physical assets and equipment? Write a plan for how best protect assets such as computers and equipment. Review your property insurance policies related to wind, flood, and named storm damages – including types of coverage (e.g. Do you have business interruption or loss of use coverage?), limits of that coverage, deductibles, and documentation requirements. Your broker or your lawyer should be able to assist with this analysis.
  - Does your type of business require an on-site support team in the event of a hurricane for business continuity? Where personnel must remain on site, make sure to have ample supplies, safety measures, communication plans, and support for the employees and their families.
  - Before the storm, identify and contract with outsourced professionals

**Key Suppliers** Assess what suppliers or vendors your company relies on to do its day-to-day business. Even if your office is not on a coastal area, as we have seen in the past and are experiencing with the pandemic, supply chain issues can significantly impair a business that is heavily reliant upon its vendors. Create a potential contingency plan for those essential supplies.

After performing these basic assessments, create a plan and if possible practice that plan ahead of time. There is not one-size fits all for a preparedness plan, but another helpful checklist from the U.S. Small Business Administration, found [HERE](#).

### **Call it Early**

Hurricanes give a little time to prepare, but not much. Many experts and other sources on this subject say that declaring the emergency within the company and implementing the plan early is important to keeping people safe, and taking necessary measures before circumstances become dire.

### **Communication is Key**

During a crisis that can affect both the health and safety of employees, as well as your business, communication is crucial. Effective communication with your employees, clients, and customers can help ease fears, stave-off panic, and convey stability.

Plan how you will communicate with both internal employees, as well as external customers, clients, and business contacts.

When asked about counseling clients in a crisis, Afton Baily Griffin, CEO of A Brand Strategy Consulting, said, “[p]reparing our clients for any catastrophic events, such as hurricanes and the pandemic to name a few, is all centered on communication and managing expectations. Ensuring you have consistent messaging across all platforms from social media, to email correspondence, and to the company website maintains client/customer confidence throughout any uncertainties. We also encourage staying ahead of any potential miscommunications by reaching out early and often while staying transparent with shifting company policies depending on the circumstances.”

Selecting one point of contact for communication with communications vendors, clients, customers and media is a way to help maintain desired consistency that Griffin says is critical. Likewise, to the extent possible, one point of contact for communication with employees may prevent internal miscommunication.

### **Utilize (Outsourced) Professionals When Possible**

A hurricane and its after effects can influence almost all facets of a business. To the extent that the time and energy of company leadership is more valuable to the business when leading personnel and strategizing mitigation efforts, put professionals in place to assist with *implementing* recovery of physical assets, data and technology, repairs, and assisting even with outside communication. Many employees of the business (including those at the executive level) may be simultaneously dealing with devastating personal loss or damage, in addition to contributing as an employee. Outsource recovery efforts when possible since employees may not be in a position to reach the site and assist, or it may not be safe to do so.

### **“PIVOT!”**

Getting hit with a hurricane and its after effects can often feel like another episode of Murphy’s Law: *“anything that can go wrong, will go wrong.”* The best way to combat that old adage is through planning and flexibility. Although those concepts seem to contradict each other, they are both important to keep a business afloat during crisis. A plan is vital to make sure all aspects are considered and nothing is missed, but flexibility in implementing the plan when new facts and circumstances are added can mean the difference between business continuity and major loss.

**For more information or discussion in creating preparedness plan for your business, please contact [Sara McEown](#).**