

Disaster Just Struck Your Business, Are You Prepared?

By: Mark D. Gibson

Today, more than ever, we are reminded that disaster and tragedy can hit at any moment.



Memorial Day through Labor Day are considered the 101 Critical Days of Summer for safety awareness. Is your business prepared?

Today is the day to dust off the disaster preparedness plan or develop one. You never think it can happen to you, but during the past decade, we've seen major hurricanes bypass

Florida and move up the Eastern seaboard leaving behind devastated businesses and communities. Whether the disaster is a hurricane, flood, tornado, or raging wildfire, the unthinkable can happen. The very nature of disasters requires planning for the unthinkable. Do you have a plan? What will it take to survive and rebuild your business after a disaster? Do you exercise these plans?

June 1st is the official beginning of hurricane season in the U.S. There are steps you can take now to protect your business and your employees should a natural disaster hit. The Atlantic coastline of the U.S. is expected to have an above-average level of hurricane activity in 2013, according to Gerry Bell, the lead scientist of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration long-range hurricane outlook team. "If there's one thing that we learned last year, it's that when a storm hits, we've got to be ready. Education, preparation -- that's what makes a difference. That's what saves lives," President Obama said May 28th while visiting the Jersey Shore where he assessed the damage and pledged continued support to the region. "Make a plan. It's never too early," the President said encouraging people to visit ready.gov, a federal web site with instructions and plans on how to prepare for a hurricane.

In addition to ready.gov, the SBA teams up with Mr. Bob Boyd, President and CEO of Agility Recovery Solutions to provide business owners and entrepreneurs advice on how to get ready.

Planning for the Unthinkable: Developing Your Disaster Preparedness Plan. (Podcast and Transcript)

Where many people and businesses fall short is the lack of planning. In this podcast Mr. Boyd offers advice to prepare yourself, your employee's and your business.

Skipping ahead to the end of the 1st Podcast in a two part series makes so much sense and easy to do within a matter of minutes.

These few minutes invested in planning can mean the world of difference in times of crisis. No matter how you dissect the notion of disaster preparedness planning, the mere fact the planning is occurring is the most important. Each step in the process can be equally important. *...Then the last part that we'd recommend is really to create a crisis communication plan. Make sure that you*

think through multiple ways that you can communicate with your customers, your employees, your vendors, your community. Have a phone tree. Make sure that you have alternative contact numbers for them. Maybe go so far as creating a password protected web page that you could direct your employees or your customers to go to. Think through an alert notification system so that you could send out text messages or emails alternative to your primary systems. Begin to use social media, so thinking about using Facebook or twitter or Google Groups or those types services as a way to help you communicate information to your stakeholders in a crisis is really, really important. It's one of these things that I think all of us could improve on.

(Click here to see the entire transcript.)

The SBA has also partnered with the American Red Cross to increase awareness in the business community about the Red Cross Ready Rating Program. It's a free self-paced web-based membership program that helps a business measure its ability to deal with emergencies and give customized feedback on how to improve those efforts. You can go to www.readyrating.org.



Taking steps to protect your employees, your hard-earned investment, your business, and your peace of mind may seem challenging at first. But, the long-term benefit of being prepared is immeasurable. Having a business continuity plan will only improve your chances of staying in the game. Now, for more information on Agility's Prepare My Business, go to www.preparemybusiness.org.

To learn more about what SBA has to offer in disaster assistance, go to www.sba.gov/disaster.

The time to act is today, don't wait for the first hurricane in a century to come barreling up the coast of Georgia to be the time to think about planning for disaster, plan for the unthinkable today.