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Floods, outages reinforce need for recovery planning

By

Even if your business has so far avoided this year's storm-induced floods and power outages, there's more to come. Count on it.

That makes your recovery plan — the actions you take in advance to get your business back in operation as quickly as possible — important.

"Business owners are good at dealing with today's crisis. But one of the challenges small businesses face," Marcia Kittler says, "is realizing they need to plan for disaster recovery. We have to understand what we need to do to get our businesses back to normal."

Kittler knows. President of her own small business, M K Business Solutions, Inc., Chicago, Kittler is a continuity planner. She helps businesses plan for, and thus speed up, the comeback from a disaster.

Even better, Kittler is quick to suggest online resources that contain a wealth of help for small businesses:

• The federal government — yes, that one — has remarkably simple disaster recovery planning help at www.ready.gov. Click on Ready Business.

• Also visit Open for Business, www.disastersafety.org/business_protection. Put together by the Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety, the site, like Ready.gov., has everything from checklists to training guides. The "Critical Business Functions" link will make you think.

Among the ideas from Kittler, Ready.gov and Open for Business:

• Think about purchasing portable generators, especially if your business relies on technology. Consider a standby generator that is pre-wired to your most important equipment and will kick in even if you're not there.

• If you have a data center on site, think about portable air conditioners to keep essential equipment alive.

• Get the computer off the floor and put it on a desk. Do the same with paperwork, especially with papers stored in a basement.

• Cross train staff. "Train someone to do what Mary Jane does" in case Mary Jane can't get to the office, Kittler says. Actually, cross training is a good idea, disaster or not.

• Because a disaster might bypass your business but hit a vendor, talk to your suppliers about their disaster

recovery plans — especially if your business depends on supplies from just a key vendor or two.

Ask for a copy of their disaster recovery plan. Then ask someone with knowledge to review it for adequacy.

Being certain your vendors can recover can be especially important, Kittler says, if, for example, your critical supplier is a widget maker on the Florida coast, where hurricanes roam.

• If your operation depends on machinery that takes three months to replace, work now to set up a sharing arrangement with another company that uses the same equipment — keeping in mind that sharing means you may need to share your capacity as well as borrow someone else's.

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