

PREPARATION AND PLANNING FOR FLOODS



Marsh Risk Consulting offers the following advice to organizations that may be affected by flooding. This report is designed to outline a general business continuity and health and safety checklist to help get your business running back to normal as quickly as possible.

IMMEDIATE BUSINESS ACTIONS

Businesses need to consider the following actions, which should be featured in their pre-flooding plans:

- Deploy high-capacity diesel pumps to pump out water from levels below ground level. There is likely to be a premium on obtaining such pumps during any disaster, hence early identification and reservation will be important. (Warning: The exhausts from diesel or petrol pumps can be lethal in confined spaces.)
- Once pumping out has been completed, drying out will be necessary with industrial-scale blowers.
- Inspect fuel tanks for water contamination.
- Deploy pumps to remove contaminated water from water storage tanks. Until this water is replaced and clean water flushed through, health and safety regulations prevent people from returning to the building and using the facilities.
- Check the drains and sewerage system as they may well have become blocked and “backed up”.

- Check all electrical systems thoroughly; some rewiring may be necessary. If power has been switched off or disrupted then systems may need to be checked and reconfigured, for example, alarms, clocks, etc.
- Consider employing specialised restoration businesses to recover damaged technology, documents, and other material, for example, freeze-drying paperwork and employing anti-mould treatments. Note that it is vital that these services are deployed early to contain the damage.
- Employ qualified cleaners to renovate properties

RECOVERY ACTIONS

The viability of businesses will depend on the speed with which they can get back on their feet. Hence, it will be important to:

- Contact insurers with details and photographs of all damage. (Contact salvage and restoration companies if necessary.)
- Activate alternative recovery sites or move key activities to new premises if possible.

- Focus on maintaining critical activities, for example, staff, utilities, IT, finance, and payroll. (A business impact analysis – a standard part of business continuity planning – would have identified these critical points.)
- Inform clients/customers/suppliers of the situation and recovery plans.
- Plan for stock replacement and vehicle/fleet servicing.
- Implement a scheme to help staff with their personal circumstances, for example, transport, accommodation, care of dependents, etc.

HEALTH AND SAFETY ACTIONS

To safeguard your staff and assets, Marsh Risk Consulting recommends the following general health and safety steps:

CLEANING UP

Floodwater may contain sewage and other pollution. You must ensure that the following steps are taken during clean up:

- Do not re-enter your premises until all floodwater has been removed. The Fire and Rescue Service may be able to help you with pumping water out of your premises.
- Secure empty buildings until reoccupation is possible.
 - Wear waterproof boots and gloves to clean surfaces or move objects that have been in contact with the floodwater.
- Wash your hands thoroughly after handling anything that may be contaminated and use hot soapy water and liquid anti-bacterial soap.
- Ventilate your premises after flooding – less damp is less damage.
- Remove all furnishings and fittings that are damaged beyond repair.
- Wash down all hard surfaces, such as flooring, concrete, mouldings, wood and metal furniture, countertops, appliances, sinks, and other plumbing fixtures with hot water and laundry or dish detergent. Then disinfect them with a solution of one cup of household bleach to a gallon of water.



- Launder all clothing in a hot wash (60 degrees celsius or the highest temperature indicated on the washing label) to destroy most bacteria present. Clothing that cannot be machine washed should be dry cleaned or disposed of. Clothes worn during the cleanup should be washed as above separately from uncontaminated clothes and linens.
- Air dry in the sun any items, such as upholstered furniture, that cannot be washed or dry cleaned. They should then be sprayed thoroughly with a disinfectant. All carpeting should be steam cleaned where possible.
- Allow the premises and remaining contents to thoroughly dry to help to destroy bacteria left behind. Heating and good ventilation will help the drying process.
- Vacuum any loose material and dust on a regular basis.
- All food contact surfaces, equipment, utensils, work tables, etc. Must be thoroughly sanitised before reusing. Any heavily contaminated items should be thrown away.
- All food that may have been contaminated must be destroyed. Initially this must be double bagged and placed in a sealed container to prevent attracting pests.

- The Yellow Pages lists details of qualified assistance, such as plumbers, electricians, and suppliers of cleaning materials and equipment. This can be found under “flood damage”. However, you are advised to be aware of the rise in bogus trades persons that can occur at such times.

REDUCING THE RISK TO HEALTH

The risk of infection can be reduced by ensuring that the staff take the following general hygiene precautions and wear protective clothing (waterproof boots and gloves) when cleaning up:

- Always wash hands with soap and clean water.
- When eating or preparing food.
- After using the toilet.
- After being in contact with flood water, sewage, or items that have been contaminated by flood water.
- After being involved in flood water cleanup.
- Keep cuts or sores clean, and wear waterproof plasters to prevent exposure to flood water.
- Advise staff to visit their GP if they develop symptoms such as sickness, diarrhoea, stomach cramps, or illness following accidental swallowing of mud or contaminated water.
- Ensure any mould growth is properly treated.

REDUCING THE RISK TO SAFETY

The risk to safety can be reduced by taking the following precautions:

- It may be necessary to contact utility providers to reconnect supplies. Do not use electrical circuits or equipment exposed to flood water until checked by a qualified electrician.
- Do not use any internal lifts until power supplies are back to normal.
- Do not enter any confined spaces, such as cellars, where there is known oil/petrol contamination.
- Take care with timber floorboards as they may contain raised nails. Similarly, there may be a risk of injury from sharp edges on damaged tiled floors.



- Check for structural damage to the property and, if you think there may be damage or danger, seek professional advice from your insurers or a structural engineer.

OPERATING WITHOUT AN ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

In the event of a loss of electricity, a risk assessment should be carried out to determine whether or not it is safe to continue working. The local workplace, health, safety and welfare regulations (as applicable) may require that the workplace is adequately ventilated; there is suitable and sufficient lighting. It is unlikely that a business would be able to operate safely for any extended period of time where there is a loss of electricity supply.

OPERATING WITHOUT A MAINS WATER SUPPLY

In the event of a loss of mains water supply, a risk assessment should be carried out to determine if it is safe to continue working. The local workplace, health, safety, and welfare regulations may require that workplaces have suitable and sufficient sanitary conveniences and washing facilities in readily accessible places. Washing facilities should have running hot and cold water.

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