

Business Continuity Planning

Business continuity planning is the process of creating a procedure to recover the most vulnerable parts of your business or organisation after a disruptive event occurs.

A disruptive event, such as a fire, flood, burglary or loss of IT services or data can have a significant effect on your organisation's ability to operate normally. A Business Continuity Plan (BCP) will assist you in getting back up and running quickly by providing a pre-arranged plan of action of what to do, and who should do it. Your BCP should be kept remotely, so it's always accessible, and should be reviewed regularly. Periodic simulated scenario "test runs" will ensure that it is fit for purpose.

You should aim to include all the following sections in your Business Continuity Plan.

Direction and control

This section describes your direction and control system, which manages resources, analyses information and aids decision making in an emergency.

This should include details of your policy on business continuity and contacts for your Emergency Management Group, who will coordinate emergency response. Also under this section, you should detail the process that should be followed in the event of an emergency.

Communication

Do not underestimate the importance of clear communication in an emergency. Ensure you have communication, notification and warning channels planned and accessible. You should record any confidentiality requirements, so that emergency communications do not 'leak' confidential information.

To facilitate easy communication, include an organisational chart, client lists, utility provider information and suppliers and equipment providers under this section.

Preparedness

Protecting your employees and clients – as well as the public – is your priority during an emergency. Under your preparedness section you should include your plans for evacuations and assembly, shelter and the training that is required to maintain your level of readiness for emergencies.

Property

Organising a system that protects your facilities, equipment and records is essential to business continuity. Under this section you should determine which systems are appropriate (fire protection, overflow monitoring etc.) and how to mitigate risk (fire sprinklers, fire-resistant materials etc.).

Also include a thorough emergency shutdown procedure, to be used as a last resort, and include building information such as valves and shut-offs. Assess the vital records and data that you hold and establish procedures for protecting and accessing them.

Community outreach

Involving the third parties and outside organisations in your business continuity plan can be beneficial and may be necessary. In this section of your planning, you could include mutual aid agreements between your organisation and other local businesses or charities – meaning assistance is always available and ready. You should also plan for any public and media communications that you may have to undertake should the incident be serious enough. Don't forget to engage local stakeholders, such as neighbours and other businesses in your plans and ask for their help, thoughts, and support.

Recovery and restoration

Recovery and restoration is key; this is about keeping your staff working, clients catered for and cash flow alive. This section will be relatively comprehensive and will feature your plans for logistics, operations, service, marketing, management, and HR.

Implementation and maintenance

It is extremely important to review your plan regularly and update it should any circumstances change. Integrate your plan into your company's procedures and training schedules and ensure everyone is aware of their roles. Role playing, drills and mock exercises can be useful too.