

Business Continuity Planning

A business continuity plan (also called a continuity of operations plan or COOP) is a written document that outlines how an organization will respond and recover from a major emergency or localized disaster like server failure or burst water pipes. When disaster strikes, having a plan in place and being able to put it into immediate action can mean the difference between staying open to serve the needs of customers or shutting down for a few days or weeks.

What's included in a business continuity plan?

At a minimum, a continuity plan should include critical information:

- A list of important contacts including your insurance company, key customers and vendors and staff contacts.
- A map showing locations of important equipment to relocate (computers and servers) and where to shut off electricity, gas and other services.
- Procedures to protect your property and minimize business disruption – e.g., remote back-up of computer files, a plan to relocate inventory or livestock.
- A back-up location to conduct business while the building is being repaired.

Most have also have step-by-step instructions to:

- Understand operations and supply chain;
- Maintain the workforce;
- File an insurance claim;
- Ensure delivery of goods and services;
- Assess facility operations;
- Assess risk for reopening and likelihood of success; and
- Finance recovery operations.

Having a continuity of operations plan can help business identify and assign essential tasks that will help minimize the damage and reduce recovery time and expense.

To be effective, ongoing training and practice with the plan helps assure the plan is tested, updated, and employees are properly trained.

Continuity of Operations Templates and Information

The US Small Business Administration <https://www.sba.gov/content/disaster-preparedness> offers has an online tool to help business create a continuity of operations plan <http://www.preparemybusiness.org/planning> as well as more detailed information on how to prepare and protect your employees and business and from disasters and floods.

FEMA also has online tools to help businesses develop a plan to address the impact of natural and human made disasters <http://www.ready.gov/business>.

STEPS TO PROTECT BUSINESS OPERATIONS

To do before a disaster:

- Ensure safety lights, smoke detectors and fire extinguishers are in place.
- Develop systems to work off site.
- Identify alternative sites for business operations.
- Locate critical objects up off the floor and out of basements.
- Create a communications plan for employees and key contacts.
- Digitize business records and keep an off-site copy.
- Have a website.
- Talk with your town about their continuity planning.
- Help your employees be more prepared at home.

Other free resources to help businesses prepare for natural disasters, including business continuity plan templates, include:

- ➔ Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety – general information and templates – <https://www.disastersafety.org>.
- ➔ American Red Cross Ready Rating Program – business and organizational disaster readiness self-assessment tool – <http://www.readyrating.org>
- ➔ Internal Revenue Service – short video introducing COOP – <http://www.irsvideos.gov/Individual/DisasterInformation/BusinessContinuityPlanning>
- ➔ Vermont Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security – <http://vem.vermont.gov/sites/vem/files/Business%20Workbook%20Fillable%202014.pdf>
- ➔ CERF+ (Craft Emergency Relief Fund + Artists' Emergency Resources) offers tailored disaster guidance and recourses for artists – <http://studioprotector.org/OnlineGuide/DisasterPlanning/DisasterSpecificPlanningResources.aspx>.



Additional Assistance

The Vermont Small Business Development Center <http://www.vtsbdc.org> and many of Vermont's Regional Development Corporations <http://accd.vermont.gov/business/partners/rdc> and Regional Planning Commissions <http://www.vapda.org> can also provide training and one-on-one assistance to help your business develop a continuity of operations plan.