

Disaster Preparedness: What About Your Employees?

If you're like most companies, you have a disaster recovery plan for your data and crucial systems. These types of plans are necessary for you to resume business in the event of an earthquake, tornado, hurricane, fire, or other disaster. But, have you ever considered the situation where disaster struck during the workday while your employees are at work and cannot leave? Are you prepared for such an emergency?

First, you have to consider the peak number of people who could be at your facility at any time. It's always best to over-plan than under-plan. Once you have that number, it is much easier to prepare. Plan to have enough food and supplies for each person to survive 72-hours, since it could take that long before assistance arrives.

If you are lucky enough to have an on-site cafeteria, you should be much more prepared, as there is presumably food. If not, it's time to stock up. Many companies have vending machines, so there may be some candy bars, chips and soda pop available. But if the disaster strikes before the vendor can fill up the machine, it may not do you any good. However, even if you have a cafeteria and/or vending machines, remember the power may be out, so there will be no method to cook or refrigerate perishables.

Protein bars, granola bars, crackers, trail mix and dried fruits are good to have on hand. Don't overlook juice and water, either. In fact, a good rule of thumb is to have one gallon of water per person per day. If you keep canned food, such as tuna fish, chili or stew, be sure there is a can opener. One thing to note: cans that have the "pop-top" lids that open without a can opener may explode after years of storage.

If you live in a climate where the weather could get cold, emergency heat blankets are a must. Flashlights and radios are also a good idea: just don't forget to have extra batteries. You can purchase emergency radios that you crank to charge. They usually include a flashlight, siren and cell phone charger as well.

First aid supplies are necessary. Instead of buying Band-Aids, gauze, aspirin and other items separately, investing in a few first aid kits is probably your best bet. Also, have extra toiletries, such as anti-bacterial sanitizers and/or moist towelettes, contact lens solution, toilet paper and feminine hygiene products on-hand. Be aware of any special needs of your employees.

You may want to keep everything in waterproof bags, and store them in a place that is easily accessible. Be sure the bags aren't so heavy they can't be carried. One critical note: don't forget to check and rotate your supply. It's wise to check and update everything every six months.

It's important to be ready for anything, and that's why businesses are sure to have a business resumption plan. But your disaster recovery plan should also include your most valuable asset: your employees.