

# Business continuity: protecting your human capital.

Insights for protecting, informing  
and redeploying your workforce.



Since September 11, 2001, disaster preparedness has become a common part of our national dialogue. The Southeast Asian tsunami in 2004, Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and the ongoing threat of terrorism have only made it more imperative that companies prepare for potentially catastrophic events. As a result, many organizations have developed disaster preparedness plans. They have invested heavily in protecting infrastructure like buildings, IT and financial systems — areas which have historically been the main focus of these plans. However, when it comes to protecting their greatest asset — their employees — some companies are struggling to determine an appropriate plan.

Protecting people can be much more challenging than protecting property, but there are fundamental things organizations can do to protect their employees. By helping businesses determine how best to respond to each new crisis, Lee Hecht Harrison has learned important lessons that will assist your company in preparing for the next disaster — before it strikes. These practical suggestions will help you develop a plan to better protect, inform and redeploy your workforce when necessary. It's a new world, and disaster preparedness is becoming a routine part of it.

## **Protecting: helping employees prepare to protect themselves.**

As your most significant asset, employees may also be the riskiest. Each day, they leave the office to head home to their private lives.

If they don't return to work because they weren't prepared at home, your business may feel the effect. Fortunately, there are things your company can do to help employees protect themselves in the event of a disaster.

Your company intranet, newsletter or other form of company-wide communication is the best way to disseminate key information regarding preparedness. For instance, September is National Preparedness Month, which makes it the perfect time to distribute a company-wide e-mail with a list of suggested emergency supplies employees should have on hand at home. However, you don't have to wait for September — remember, disasters can strike at any time and there's no wrong time to ensure your employees are prepared.

Please visit: [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org), [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov) and [www.dhs.gov](http://www.dhs.gov) for additional information. Determining how your office or team will communicate and evacuate in the event of an emergency is an essential part of any disaster preparedness plan. Ensuring all members of your organization are aware of the plan — and practicing so it becomes second nature — is just as important.

Consider the number of times people in your office have been confused about protocol during a fire drill. Now imagine that same reaction in the midst of an actual crisis — valuable time may be lost as panic and confusion cause chaos. Having plans in place, practicing them regularly and making them a part of the orientation process for each new employee will help ensure

that everyone knows where to go; who to check in with to let them know they are safe and receive updates; and how to determine when it's time to come back to work

**Informing: stellar communication before, during and after a crisis is critical.**

In the event of a disaster, it is crucial that employees know what to do, where to go and what to expect during and after the incident. Companies with strong communications plans in place have a better chance of accounting for their workforce, deploying help where it's needed, enabling people to telecommute from wherever they are and getting business ramped up again when it's time.

One way to ensure that your employees have the information they need is by creating a wallet-sized emergency contact card. The card should include an overview of the information flow process, such as who employees should call to confirm their location and status, as well as details on where and when they should gather for information updates (e.g., 9:00am every morning at the local public school). A phone number where recorded messages are left with regular information updates can also be helpful, as can additional details including supervisors' phone numbers, the web address and 800 number for your company's health insurance provider and a URL for your own company's information portal.

During recent natural disasters, the Internet was the best mode of communication, as phone service — both land line and cellular — was unavailable. Creating and maintaining a microsite (a separate information portal that is ready to be deployed with information updates in the event of a disaster) should be

considered as part of an organization's recovery plan. Documents or information that can be stored on the site include:

- **Reporting list protocol:** Details on who is responsible for tracking different groups of employees and how that information will be shared.
- **Contact information:** Mobile phone numbers, home phone numbers, e-mail and home addresses (this can be restricted access for supervisors only).
- **Meeting locations:** Meeting times and location details/addresses for in-person gatherings for information updates and action planning.
- **Local and national resources:** You may want to have a list of links and phone numbers for local resources (schools, hospitals, Department of Labor, etc.) and national resources (Red Cross, FEMA, etc.) as an easy-to-use reference.

**Redeploying: helping employees regain a sense of normalcy and head back to work.**

One of the most notable insights we gained, particularly with major disasters such as the earthquake in India or the Southeast Asian tsunami, is the importance of work in the recovery process. In order for people to move on, their sense of normalcy must be restored. For children, returning to the familiarity and routine of school is often a significant step towards recovery. For adults, returning to work provides a semblance of comfort and stability and helps them get back on their feet. By getting business going again, companies can play a meaningful role in helping people and communities recover. Below are important issues that should be considered when redeploying your workforce.

“Katrina changed everything for me. One minute, I could say that everything I owned was truly mine. I lived on my own, paid my rent and bills on time, and could sometimes help others. I had savings. I never took a handout from anybody, just like my dad. Now, I can say that every single thing I have is a handout. People here in Georgia have been so generous. I have lots of nice things — nicer than before. But nothing feels familiar. I think getting back to work will make me feel more at home here.”

– Relocated Katrina Victim quoted in *The Atlanta Journal Constitution* (Dec. 2005)

- **Give people transition time.** People want to work and companies will most certainly be eager to get started up again, but giving employees time and space to transition back into “the real world” can pay dividends in the long run. After a disaster, everyone needs time to recover. So rally the troops, but do so in a way that isn’t overly demanding at a tough time. Employees will appreciate the sensitivity, which may help foster greater long-term loyalty and productivity.
- **Provide a way to give back.** When a major disaster strikes, people want to do something. By establishing a way for your workforce to give back on a volunteer basis as a small or large group, companies contribute to the cause — and improve employee morale. Businesses that show their altruistic side may see increased recruitment and retention rates as well, since companies with a conscience are highly valued — especially by younger workers.
- **Show that leadership cares.** If leadership doesn’t reach out during tough times it can create an unnecessary sense of concern about how an organization will rebuild and

what an employee’s role in that process will be. A letter, an e-mail, an intranet posting or a town hall meeting where leaders express appropriate concern and discuss a game plan for moving forward can help give employees a sense of confidence during tenuous times.

In today’s complex world, preparing your company to respond to the range of possible disasters may seem daunting. However, there are basic, practical steps your business can take to ensure that, in the event of a disaster, your employees are protected, informed and, when the time is right, redeployed. While some refining may be necessary to ensure that a disaster preparedness plan meets your company’s individual needs, having a strong foundation in place will enable you to design a plan that will protect your business’s most valuable asset — your employees.

**Contact your local Lee Hecht Harrison branch today for helpful tips on issues that impact your business! Visit our website at [LHH.com](http://LHH.com) for more information or to locate an office nearest you.**

# DISASTER PREPAREDNESS CHECKLIST

## HOME CHECKLIST

(Source: American Red Cross)

- Family communications plan
  - Evacuation plan
  - Supplies kit:
    - \_ Water
    - \_ Food
    - \_ Medications
    - \_ Tools & supplies
    - \_ Sanitation
    - \_ Clothing & bedding
    - \_ Emergency car kit
    - \_ Important family documents
- 

## OFFICE CHECKLIST

(Source: Lee Hecht Harrison)

- Team communications plan
  - Evacuation plan
  - Supplies kit:
    - \_ Sneakers
    - \_ Flashlight
    - \_ Pre-paid cell phone
    - \_ Cash
    - \_ Alternative transportation routes
    - \_ Water
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## FINANCIAL CHECKLIST

(Source: Ken Petersen, investment adviser as published in The Monterey County Herald - Sept. 7, 2006)

- In a sturdy box that is easy to carry, include:
  - \_ Copies of the past four years' tax returns
  - \_ One week's worth of cash
  - \_ Copy of final escrow for home owners
  - \_ List of major home improvements and their cost
  - \_ Photos, DVD or video tape of the inside and outside of your house
  - \_ Copies of all important documents: birth certificates, wills, trusts, citizenship papers, green cards, Social Security cards
  - \_ Copies of your ATM and credit cards, front and back
  - \_ Back-up discs of financial files
  - \_ Copies of drivers license(s) for all the drivers in the family and titles and registrations for all cars
  - \_ A list of investments and bank accounts with phone numbers for each