From: Steve Elliot
To: selliot@gmail.com;
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Elliot Consulting Services - Business Resiliency Tips

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Crisis Management

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Greetings!

This week, more than 3,000 emergency managers, forecasters, vendors, and state and local officials are gathering in Ft. Lauderdale for the Governor's Hurricane Conference. The participants are reviewing Florida's level of readiness to respond to major emergencies along with seminars on emergency center operations, projected tropical weather patterns, public information and media relations, and damage assessment skills. Some of the key points of discussion will be crisis management and the coordination of the various agencies who will respond during a time of disaster. As business owners and managers we can utilize this time to consider the lessons learned from previous emergency situations and evaluate our own crisis management plans and levels of readiness.

So far this year, the headlines have been filled with numerous stories of weather- related natural disasters such as tornados, floods, severe winter weather, wildfires, and the Atlantic's first named storm of the 2007 season. Additionally we've seen the destruction caused by a tanker truck catching fire on a freeway in Northern California, watched in horror as tragedy unfolded on a college campus in Virginia, and breathed a sigh of relief after learning that a terrorist plot was stopped before shots could be fired on a US military base in New Jersey.

Each of these situations required some system for managing the crisis. The basic components of those systems should be incorporated into the plan that your company uses to respond to emergency situations. This article will address just two of the components of a crisis management plan - a Crisis Management Team, and a plan for emergency notification and communications.

In order to effectively manage a crisis situation, an organization needs a team of people with the ability and the authority to make quick, objective decisions which will protect the health and safety of their employees, and ensure the security and resilience of business operations. This Crisis Management Team (CMT) is comprised of a small group of managers with specialized experience and training. The CMT is immediately notified of all emergency situations so that they can assess the scenario and determine the appropriate response for the organization. In some cases that decision will be to contact 911 and evacuate the building, while in other cases the decision might be to formally declare a disasterous situation in advance of a hurricane and invoke a series of pre-determined procedures to protect the people, critical information, facility, and means of doing business. The CMT reacts, evaluates, and responds to these situations, and manages the life safety issues while

waiting for the local first responders. If the situation requires, the CMT would also make the decision to set up an emergency command center and begin staffing that facility with pre-determined key people from the organization.

Once this team is established and empowered, the next challenge is to decide how to notify everyone in the organization of the incident and how to advise them of the emergency procedures which need to be followed. Depending upon the circumstances a series of telephone calls may be an effective means of communication, however in many cases a company's telephone system may be disabled, or the telephone network may be too congested to handle voice calls, or the telephone "call tree" system may be too time-consuming or simply too unreliable. In those cases alternate forms of communication must be utilized. These alternates might include cellular phones, text messaging, walkie- talkies, Ham radio, Email, and others.

Another consideration in the emergency communications process is the notification message itself. During a time of crisis when stress levels are high, it is vitally important to communicate concisely and clearly so that everyone will understand the message and follow the appropriate instructions. Experts reccomend the "3-3-30 rule" which says you should deliver no more than three ideas, written in no more than three sentences, with a total of thirty words or less in the message - (3 ideas - 3 sentences - 30 words). It is a good idea to script these messages ahead of time to simplify and standardize those critical communications.

A crisis can happen at any time to any organization. The best way to manage the situation is to plan, prepare, and be ready to respond. Consider developing a Crisis Management Team within your organization and establishing some plans for emergency notification and communications.

If you would like more information about crisis management procedures and the ideas discussed in this newsletter then please contact Elliot Consulting.

Steve Elliot, CBRM
President and CEO
Elliot Consulting Services

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Useful BCP Links

- TAMP Systems Planning Software for Business Continuity
- Dept of Homeland Security / FEMA
- IBHS - "Open For Business"
- Florida Division of Emergency Management
- National Hurricane Center
- Tampa Bay Hurricane Guide

About Elliot Consulting

Elliot Consulting Services (ECS) was founded in 2003 to provide business continuity planning and emergency preparedness services. Being prepared for the unexpected is the key to the resiliency of one's business. A disaster can be the smallest setback that disrupts normal operations or an unavoidable catastrophic event. Business resiliency is not just about the process of recovering from a disaster - it is also about maintaining continuous daily operations and protecting your critical business operations, systems, and procedures.

Elliot Consulting functions as a third party advocate and facilitator to help companies create, develop, and implement all-hazards crisis management and business resiliency plans which are designed to protect their vital business resources and operational processes. ECS has the experience to review, audit, and help modify a company's existing disaster recovery and business continuity programs to ensure that the essential components of their organization will continue to function in the event of an unplanned disruptive incident. The team from Elliot Consulting will also assist with staff training and simulation exercises, and regular plan validations and updates to test the thoroughness of a company's preparedness model. At the conclusion of a consulting engagement ECS will award the client a Certificate of Business Resilience, recognized by a number of auditing bureaus and insurance adjustors, for the development of a Business Continuity Plan in accordance with industry-standard best practices. The ECS consultants are certified business continuity planners and business resiliency specialists with Fortune 500 experience.

Additional information can be found on the ECS website.

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Phone: 813-792-8833
Website: http://www.elliot-consulting.com

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