

Averting Disaster

DISASTER PLAN...MAINTAINING IS KEY

Like many businesses, the Y2K scare did make many companies address contingency plans for a disaster. At that point, Textile Care Services, Rochester, Minnesota had a make-shift plan, but nothing specific enough to meet the needs of reality.

They knew that building their Disaster Plan would take a great deal of dedication, and assigned one individual to be responsible for the process. They were astutely aware that such a plan would quickly become obsolete if not reviewed, revised, and updated on a regular basis. So even before their plan was crafted, they determined that maintaining the plan was critical to success.

Initial planning involved development of emergency scenarios that could shut down or disable their process. Since Textile Care Services processes for both the hospitality and healthcare marketplace both of these areas had to be addressed. This includes uniforms, bed and bath, tabletop, and surgical apparel. We determined that our best approach was to divide our product lines and utilize multiple backup facilities. We assigned our supervisors to accompany each product line to assist the backup facility in processing our linen. In some cases we will supply our staff to process our linen at their facility.

We realized that the disasters most likely to impact our location/operation differently based on the situation encountered. Therefore our fire plan, flood plan, and tornado plan each require a different response and plan of action. This process required considerable time and coordination of many to reach a final workable solution for all parties involved.

Quarterly meetings continue in order to assure that our plan is effective as processes, customers, and products change over time. A central log is maintained with a complete list of (1) current employees and phone numbers (2) vendors and phone numbers, (3) asset lists and pictures of equipment on a disk, (4) blue prints of the plant, (5) customer lists and phone numbers, (6) updated wash formulas, (7) management and staff names and phone numbers are a few of the major items.

We meet annually to update our plan including alternative laundries that have agreed to serve as backup, evaluate our processes and to assess how we designate what products are sent to which specific location by category, i.e. surgical, hospitality, healthcare. We review/update our (1) truck rental vendor list, (2) safety training and manual, (3) boiler disaster information, (4) utility plans and (5) security guard plans. It is surprising how the contact person or company changes quickly. Every year something changes with our plan.

Maintaining this plan is just as important as doing the original disaster plan. It needs to be maintained like the machinery in the plant. We maintain six copies of this plan. These copies are for our General Manager, Human Resource Manager, Controller, Engineering Manager, Sales Manager and one is kept off site at the coordinators home.

▶ What if the telephones had not been operational, what then?

Radios and satellite backup are provided as a last resort to communicate via the ambulance service radios.

▶ How did you communicate with front-line personnel vs. the department managers?

Each department has developed a user friendly disaster quick reference guide specific to that department. All personnel are trained and drills are utilized to ensure instructions are effective. These guides are maintained in multiple locations so that implementation is not hampered by destruction at one location.



MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO THE PLAN

Disaster plans are just that, a plan. Regardless of how well you may have tried to anticipate and plan for a given situation, reality will teach you the shortcomings.

Adequate par levels were never more essential than when a tornado hit a neighboring town two years ago. Even though the laundry did not take a direct hit, we were without power for three days. Since the laundry only processed 5 days a week, we fortunately had 64 pre-made linen carts prepared for weekend use.

When on day two the power did not return, adjustments were made:

- The additional linen allowed adequate time to implement the plan to utilize our backup processing facility.
- Fortunately, phone service was available, all customers were contacted and adjustments were made in utilization to lessen the requirement for non-essential textiles.
- Due to the community advanced warning systems for severe weather, the main hospital did not experience a spike in patient census.

Tips for a well developed plan:

- Key roles and responsibilities are detailed and individuals are assigned specific tasks. This ensures that the individuals responsible have been fully trained and know their role in the plan.
- Our plan implements a response based on the level of severity for the disaster. The response for level 1 is the least severe incident, and differs from the response for a Level 4 for a full blown disaster. Communication with facility personnel specifies the level of response plan to be followed so that confusion is quickly eliminated.
- Contact information is constantly updated for staff, alternate facility backups, and our primary vendors.
- We utilize multiple back-up facilities, one to the north of us and one to the east of us.
- Disposable linen is included in the backup plan as well.

LESSONS FROM “SANDY”

Communication with management and staff during and after the disaster was paramount to our success. Having a contingency plan and practicing it plays a significant role when we really need to put it into play. Sure, we have all “talked” about it, but when you have to “live” it, you appreciate all the painful planning that needs to go into this process.

When the warnings came and the storm rolled in, no one believed that Sandy could have been as dangerous as she proved to be. Now with 2013 Hurricane Season upon us, we need to be sure we are ready in case nature strikes again.

The following are a few lessons we learned which resulted in changes put in place for the future:

Communication and Training

- Know when to activate you plan. It is not necessary to activate disaster mode each time the weather man calls for rain or snow. However, Sandy proved to be a lot stronger than originally predicted. Warnings went out earlier that morning, and we activated our Emergency Preparedness Plan. Had we waited, we would have found ourselves short-staffed and potentially in a loss of life situation.
- Be sure there is a step-by-step procedure for folks that may not have been involved in the planning or drills. When it is all-hands-on-deck, we find many “volunteers” or part time employees may not be familiar with processes.
- Communicate, communicate, communicate. Know how to reach your command post and keep them updated with the state of your operation.

Laundry and Linen Resources

Alternate linen resources are not something we had access to during the disaster simply because we were all in dire straits; thus making pre-planning crucial. A few points to keep in mind:

- Plan ahead. When the weather forecast calls for bad weather, take warning. It is far easier to plan ahead than to play catch up when everyone is struggling. It never hurts to be prepared, even if it’s all for naught. Ask your linen vendor to increase delivery pars ahead of the storm; you can always adjust pars after the storm to “right-size” your operation.
- Run facility-wide “emergency drills” throughout the year to practice linen conservation. You do not have to wait for a disaster to occur to determine if your plan works.

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- Have **Bed Change** policies and practices in place and be sure nursing staff is educated on the importance and trained on what to do in an emergency. When an emergency is declared by your facility everyone should be on board. The first 24 hours will determine your success when it comes to linen conservation.
- Our facilities have issued overnight preparedness communication for our staff. Pardon for person, our staff used far more linen than our patients. This new directive gives our staff a plan when packing for an overnight stay. There is a recommendation for what to pack; change of clothes/uniform, toiletries, pillow, blanket, etc. We also discussed purchasing and storing “airline packs,” containing small pillow, blanket, eye patch, disposable toothbrush, toothpaste, comb and wet wipes. Each employee will be issued a package if an emergency is declared and will need to maintain it during the length of the emergency.

Deliveries of product and delivery of textiles to the customer(s)

All transportation capabilities were limited during the high point of the storm; bridges were closed due to high winds and tunnels were closed for weeks following due to flooding. Planning ahead was the key to survival.

To further complicate the situation, we had power outages in many of the buildings; the emergency generators, if on ground level, were also damaged from the saltwater swells and flooding. Two of the hospitals needed to be fully evacuated due to the amount of damage and loss of power.

With the full evacuation, we realized an incredible amount of “lost” linen. As a lesson learned, we needed to have a better plan in place for tracking this loss for financial reporting and recovery. Staff training also plays an important role here. When linen is treated as an asset, it is less likely to just be given away.

With limited electricity in other buildings, we needed to distribute clean linens vertically with no elevator power. Communicating the process flow with nursing staff on linen conservation becomes very important. Also, you will need to consider soiled linen collection, particularly where chutes become inoperable or if there is a collection point at different levels of the building; getting the soiled products out of the building to control infection becomes a new challenge.

Linen items lost due to corrosive flooding must be replaced. This is quite expensive and costs need to be considered. It is helpful and recommended that you track linen flow on a consistent basis. Because we weigh clean and soiled linen daily, this gave us the necessary information to determine what was lost in this situation for FEMA reporting.

Recovery

In the aftermath, many discussions occurred around clean up and when it was safe to re-make beds. The facilities that were forced to close reopened slowly and by section. The fear is aerosolization of spores that may be carried in from areas still considered contaminated to “clean” areas. Be diligent in educating staff on this process and when it is safe to re-linen the buildings.

Two Essential Components of a Disaster Recovery Plan

1. Facility Replacement
2. Business Continuation

Facility Replacement

- Total vs. partial loss
- Replace vs. upgrade
- Build on existing or new site
- Define scope of replacement
- Develop critical path schedule

Business Continuation

- Develop a production plan
- Develop a service plan
- Develop an administrative plan
- Proper insurance coverage

A Disaster Recovery Plan must be detailed, complete and up-to-date.

Provided by Turn-Key Industrial Engineering Services, Inc.

ALM would like to thank our three contributing writers for this story. ALM members, Paul Jewison, CLLM who is the General Manager at Textile Care Services in Rochester, Minnesota; K. Scott Pannell, RLLD, CLLM who is the Manager of Linen Services at Indiana University Health Bloomington, Indiana; and Pam Obrien, CLLM, Sr. Area General Manager for Sodexo On-Site Service Solutions in New York City.