

Disaster Response – A Model Plan

I. Preparing for a disaster

a. Defining the Board's role

- Awareness of licensure requirements to alleviate fraud and deception
- Getting the word out and distributing materials
- Assist with verification of licensure
- Be informational source for homeowners to use specific classifications of contractors
- Make sure informational materials and mediums are immediately available
- Assist with state response efforts when asked
- Coordinate messaging with applicable partners
- Implement enhanced enforcement efforts
- Develop an internal structure/process to be used once disaster strikes – making sure all staff involved know what to do and how to respond to the requests that may come in
- Knowing where to direct homeowners on unrelated contracting issues – could be state emergency management agency's list of contacts; may want to partner with Department of Insurance to streamline process of referral during a disaster
- Helping consumers with the rebuilding process by providing basic consumer information

b. What to include in a disaster response plan

- Board's role
- Pre-arranged messaging that can be quickly modified to address a specific issue
- A list of key contacts, including media, partners, trade associations
- Back-up locations of where operations can move to should the main office be inoperable
- Anticipating specific disasters and issues that may arise
- Having a copy and understanding of the state's emergency response plan; knowing where you would fit in the chain of command

- Identify specific efforts that would need to be implemented to respond to homeowner concerns during a disaster
- Outline of investigators' role during a disaster, including enforcement of specific statutes relative to disasters
- Plan for website messaging; having a portal/page ready to convey and post information as it occurs. Can warn homeowners of issues being seen in the community; message to contractors about areas of need.
 - Draft press release templates
 - Brochures
 - Information on who to contact, what to do, etc.
 - Signage
 - PSA messages
- c. Investigator and staff training
 - Communication tactics – crisis communications, dealing with angry/frustrated homeowners, speaking with media, etc.
 - Understanding the role of an investigator during a disaster
 - Immediate efforts that would need to be implemented by enforcement investigators (posting signage, walking through neighborhoods informing homeowners, warning of unlicensed contractors)
 - How to identify travelers, unlicensed contractors
 - Providing homeowners tips on how to avoid intimidation
 - Making sure staff have appropriate contacts of building officials, insurance department, etc. so they can verify
 - How the insurance process works after a disaster
 - Various fraudulent acts

II. Education/Information

- a. Pre- and post-disaster messaging
 - Getting contractor board information in any statewide/local emergency publications
 - Develop timeline for messaging; expectations for when messaging would get out to the public
 - Multi-lingual messaging
 - Encourage homeowners/entities to have a pre-qualified list of contractors for various needs
 - If in a disaster-prone area, develop proactive messaging before “disaster season” begins

- Include 800 numbers
- Educating Building Departments/permitting offices on Board licensure
 - Sample signs, brochures, collateral materials
- b. Tools and tactics
 - Invite media to go out and shadow investigators meeting with homeowners, posting signs
 - Identify any opportunity to give media a story to publicize
 - Utilize social media – respond to inquiries received through comments
 - Participating in local cable shows, press conferences held by state/local officials, etc.
 - Identify areas where people are congregating as avenues to get messages out (Red Cross/Salvation Army locations; churches; schools; evacuation shelters)
 - Tailor media outreach efforts to the severity of the disaster (may require more or less outreach depending on the amount of impacted people/areas)

III. Legal framework

- a. Chain of command
 - Understanding who is in charge – state or federal
 - Making sure your Board is included on the State Emergency Management Agency contact list when a disaster occurs – integrating yourself into the response process
- b. Executive Orders
 - Being able to adapt Board policies/procedures to respond to specific directives in an EO
 - Need Governor to issue an EO declaring a disaster
 - Knowing how EOs work and how to communicate with the Governor's office
 - Any enhanced penalties?
 - Examples of EOs relative to contracting/licensure requirements
- c. Applicable laws, policies, regulations
 - Establishing an internal policy on how to respond to disaster
 - Understanding any federal regulations and knowing federal laws take precedent over state laws
 - Awareness of any enhanced penalties

- Identify if additional statutes are needed to address contracting/licensing concerns during a disaster
- Look at expedited license processes if current policies are not in place

IV. Enforcement

- a. First response efforts
 - Identify partners (law enforcement, Department of Insurance, DAs)
 - Act quickly – time is of the essence
 - Getting signage posted and/or passing out consumer materials
 - Communicating directly with homeowners
- b. Conducting sweeps/stings
 - Sweep first – pick up any immediate contractors in the area; checking license numbers; meeting with homeowners; informing how to report unlicensed contracting activities
 - Sting operations afterward – working with homeowners to see if they would be willing to donate their house for an operation
- c. Enforceable penalties and punishments
 - Administrative Actions (cease and desist orders, citations)
 - Criminal Actions
 - Civil Actions/Sanctions
 - Consider reduced fines/penalties based on conditional license criteria – addresses goal of wanting contractors to be licensed

V. Partnering

- a. Identifying your partners
 - Priority partners may include: Local police, District Attorney, Department of Insurance, Attorney General, Emergency Management Agency, Governor's Office, local building officials, Department of Industrial Relations, Building Departments, legislators)
 - Knowing the role of each partner
 - Understanding the needs/issues of each partner and how the Board can work to meet those needs
 - Clearly communicating the Board's needs/role and how the identified partners can help achieve your goals
- b. How to open lines of communication
 - Be proactive – establish a relationship before a disaster

- Engage partners in Board activities to invest them in your issues
- Establishing a key list of contacts within each partnering agency (knowing who the press staff, staff specific to certain issues, etc.)
- Send information to local legislator who is likely to receive calls from constituents

