

## From the Inside Out

Jeff Dover

### Up to the Challenge

The key to disaster management is creating a plan— before your next crisis hits

Disaster management encompasses a staggering amount of risk analysis, planning and recovery. An entire issue of this magazine would be needed to summarize all the necessary steps and actions required for proper preparation and recovery.

To get you started, this article will summarize the main steps without going deep into details.

### Risk Management

One of the first items to consider is conducting a risk analysis for each location. Assess your facility for risk against the following natural disasters:

- Tornados
- Hurricanes
- Floods
- Earthquakes
- Fires/Wildfires
- Ice and snow storms

Determine the probability of any of these events happening for each store using Operational Risk Management (ORM) and prepare a plan accordingly.

### The Planning Phase

Preparing a disaster management plan is the single most important step for protecting your employees, customers and assets.

The objective is to minimize decision time during the actual disaster, which enables you to operate the restaurant in some capacity in the least amount of time possible. The plan needs to include personnel and input from facilities, operations, human resources, IT, food safety and public relations. A well-conceived, practiced plan will assist in the decision making needed at critical points during the disaster, which could result in saving the lives of employees and customers, along with potentially saving the facility.

Any disaster management plan needs to be practiced, or drilled, periodically to familiarize everyone with their role and expectations. Mock run-throughs work well in achieving this. Review what went well and what actions need to be revised, and include these lessons learned in the new plan. Laminate and post a one-page summary of the plan in the back of house.

Each disaster management plan includes four areas:

- How to prepare
- How to minimize the effects
- Appropriate response
- Recovery

The main considerations to cover in the plan include:

1. Facility protection supplies. Staging of supplies and equipment necessary to protect the facility can include shutters or plywood for boarding up and generators in case power is disrupted. Work with your local contractors well in advance to set this up. Pre-storm protective measures will minimize building damage. The decision to board up will need to be made well in advance of the storm as the contractor's employees may be leaving the area. Also, if a generator is being used, ensure there is proper fuel available for at least three to five days.
2. Timing of metrics, e.g., what to do three to five days before a disaster, what to do 48 hours prior to a disaster, etc.
3. Preparing for power outages. Have flashlights and phone numbers for the local utility company on hand. Test your store's emergency lights monthly for proper operation.
4. Emergency supplies. Be sure to have a first-aid kit, drinking water and a portable NOAA weather radio with extra batteries.
5. Communications. In high-risk areas, keep two-way radios and a satellite phone available, as the local phone lines and mobile transmitting towers may become unavailable. Keep mobile phone chargers (external battery type) fully charged and handy for cellphones.
6. Determine your decision makers and the types and timing of required decisions, e.g., when to close the unit, when to board up, etc.
7. Food storage. Store food inventory high off the ground on shelves to keep it safe from contaminated water due to flooding.
8. Cash reserves. If possible, keep several thousands of dollars on hand for payroll. This is very important as banks and ATMs are usually not available and employees may need cash for emergency supplies.
9. Food transportation to other locations. How will you transport food from your restaurant to other facilities?
10. Communication with local public officials, especially to develop a store re-opening checklist.

No plan can be perfect; however, proper preparation can reduce risks and liabilities.

### Recovery Time

After the disaster, it's time for implementation of the response and recovery parts of the plan. Determine who should make on-the-ground decisions. Supplies and equipment should be in place and ready to mobilize. Contractors will have already been lined up and are ready to move in.

Above all, ensure the facility remains safe. Contact local public officials to acquire permits, food safety sign offs and whatever else is needed. Keep in mind that, as the facility manager, you may be involved with several stores in the disaster area. Project supervision and coordination may need to be shared with others within the organization.

### Other Considerations

Ensure your company has the proper insurance protection. Most policies do not cover flood or earthquake damage, so separate policies may be needed. Also consider business interruption insurance, which covers the financial impact of shutting the restaurant down for a period of time.

There is a large amount of disaster management knowledge available on the Internet. For a full planning toolkit, refer to the handout "Open for Business," provided by the Institute for Business and Home Safety. Their information is available at [www.sfmsdc.org/pdfs/DisasterRecoveryToolkit.pdf](http://www.sfmsdc.org/pdfs/DisasterRecoveryToolkit.pdf). I also recommend the "Emergency Action Plan for Retail Food Establishments," which can be accessed at [www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/fp/documents/emergency.pdf](http://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/fp/documents/emergency.pdf).

Jeff Dover's facility career started in 1985. He was employed by several major chains (Ponderosa, Steak & Ale, Bannigan's, TGIFriday's, Fuddruckers and recently Five Guys Burgers and Fries). His technical education enabled him to take the lead as Energy Manager, Facilities Manager and Director of Facilities at the various brands.

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