

Advice to businesses following an emergency

Further advice and guidance can be found at
http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/doing_business.aspx

Version 1.0



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The information below is aimed at helping businesses to recover following a major incident such as a fire or flood, the information is based on the experiences of small and medium business owners that have suffered these types of incidents.

Think about the following key areas

- Premises
- People
- Communications
- Equipment / stock
- Computers, network access and telecoms
- Financial issues
- Sources of help and advice

Alternate Premises

- Seek alternate premises as soon as possible.
- Other local businesses may be able to assist with short term accommodation solutions, even just as a meeting place for your core team.
- Consider what your business needs from any alternate premises e.g: ease of access for customers, access for deliveries, adequate security.
- The local authority and local commercial letting agents may be able to assist with finding alternate premises.
- Walk / drive around the local area looking for vacant premises
- Place a wanted advert in local media to advertise your need for alternate premises.

Existing (damaged) premises

- Be aware of any risks associated with the premises e.g. dangerous structures.
- Advice on personal protective equipment can be sought from the fire and rescue service and the health and safety executive.
- After the incident, ensure that site security is adequate, the initial incident may not have damaged stock but you may be prone to looters who will take advantage of the jeopardised security of the premises. Ensure that temporary security measures are adopted, either through strengthening the site or by removing valuables from the premises.
- Ensure you are kept in touch about all issues affecting your premises after the incident, e.g. any demolition work. This may be through the local council, landlord or the appointed construction / demolition company.
- Consider placing signs on or close to any damaged premises which will instruct visitors where to go and who to call, it is worth considering having these made professionally from a durable material as they may be up for many months and many seasons.

People

- Inform ALL staff as early as possible about the incident.
- Keep ALL staff informed and up to date about the recovery actions.
- Advise staff about what they should do if they are contacted by local media e.g. reference a single media spokesperson for the business. If staff are unable to work ensure they are aware of how / if they will be paid.
- If staff are being asked to perform tasks outside of their normal role ensure that they are provided with adequate protective equipment and training.
- Deal with staff very carefully, staff who are left at home in the aftermath of the incident may start to feel unimportant and even start looking at alternate employment, the long term impact of this on the business could be worse than the initial incident.
- Equally don't try to give staff jobs for the sake of something to do, when the business is back on it's feet there may be major back log issues which a well rested work force will be better equipped to deal with.

Communications

- If your incident is serious enough then the local media will take an interest.
- Work with the media to project a positive outlook for the business.
- Be aware that the media can be your best friend or worst enemy in a crisis, If they want to publicise your incident they will (with or without your help) therefore it is worth taking the time to speak to them and get your key messages out.

Think about key messages to give to local media
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Apologise – provide an apology to any customers or other individuals who may be affected by what has happened to your business.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Confidence statement – When speaking to the media give a confident outlook that your business will survive the incident with minimum disruption to staff, stakeholders and customers.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assurance – give staff, stakeholders and customers assurance that the situation is under control.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Helpline for customers – Customers will hear about what has happened and will have questions and concerns, consider setting up a means of communication that will allow customers to get their questions answered. Use the media to broadcast the communications routes which you have established.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Relocation details –Use media to advertise details of any alternate accommodation which has been sourced.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If your business has a website use it as single point of contact for staff, customers and stakeholders to obtain updates about your recovery actions. Make it a front page story with simple navigation to appropriate information.

- Contact your telecoms provider at the earliest opportunity to discuss options for diverting incoming calls from your main business number to another line.

Finance & insurance

- Keep a record of all expenditure in relation to the incident
- Take photos of any damage for your insurance claim.
- Work closely with your insurance appointed loss adjuster; seek their advice on all claim related issues. Some recovery efforts / costs may only be payable once e.g. decorating costs of a temporary premises may prevent you from claiming for decoration of permanent premises.
- Speak to your bank and explain the situation, they may be able to support you by means of rescheduling payments or loaning money to assist with recovery expenses. You may also be able to negotiate special rates for any charges incurred when requesting duplicates of accounts documents.
- Do not anticipate any leniency from the inland revenue in sympathy of the incident, expect business as usual from them and what they expect from you.
- If you have business interruption insurance be well aware of the time period for which it applies.
- Ensure that you have all documentation and receipts available to validate and speed up your claim.

Equipment / stock

- Contact all key suppliers / contractors to the business, consider all of the key messages used when talking with suppliers and contractors (communications section of this guidance). Advise them of any necessary changes to deliveries – timings, delivery locations, quantities or cancellations.
- Contact suppliers of any rented equipment to explain the situation, there may be charges for lost or damaged rented equipment which is not covered by your insurance e.g. Chip & Pin machines.

Sources of help

Other advice

- Try to recover the critical elements of your business first, the “nice to do” elements of your business can be set on hold in order to free up resources.
- Throughout the incident think about damage limitation, maintaining company image and reputation, welfare of staff and cost recovery.
- Be wary of some of your offers of assistance – there may be large costs associated which are overlooked in the interest of a quick recovery and the relative chaos of your recovery efforts.
- Contact utilities providers to explain the incident and ensure that you

are not charged for any services which you have not used.

- After the incident may be a good time to develop the business:
 - Replace damaged equipment with more up to date and future proof versions
 - Improve the resilience of the business so that you are better prepared for the next emergency or crisis
 - Improve security arrangements
 - Improve health and safety practises
 - Improvements to reduce the environmental impact of the business
 - Adjustments to business practices that will have long term benefits to company turnover.
- Maintain media contacts, there may be future opportunities to publicise your recovery success on the anniversary of your initial incident.
- Learn from the incident, put in place measures to prevent a similar incident occurring again. Develop a business continuity plan and measures to be better prepared to deal with any future disruptive incident.

Seek help from

- local business community / business clubs
- Local authority
- Your insurance company
- Your bank
- Local media
- Your website provider (if externally maintained)

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