

DISASTER PLANNING MADE EASY

The Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety (IBHS) has created a new disaster planning program for small businesses. Based on IBHS' Open for Business (OFB) program, OFB-EZ[®] is a free business continuity tool translating professional business continuity concepts into common business activities, through a simple eight step process.



WHO SHOULD USE OFB-EZ?

Many businesses are not prepared to respond to a man-made or natural disaster. One in four businesses forced to close because of a disaster never reopens. Small businesses are particularly at risk because they may have all of their operations concentrated in one location that is damaged or destroyed. Although every business needs to prepare for potential disasters, OFB-EZ is designed so that those without professional risk managers or business continuity planners can easily understand what they need to do, and how to do it.

WHY USE OFB-EZ?

The OFB-EZ tool helps small businesses take the steps they need to keep functioning in the event of a major disaster or a smaller disruption. The goal is to continue to perform your most critical operations, which will help reduce short- and long-term losses to your bottom line.

Additional benefits are that you will be contributing to your community's resiliency by keeping your employees on the job and your goods and services available to your customers. The suggested planning exercises in the online tool are a great way to build teamwork, and make sure that all of your employees know what to do in the event of an emergency.

A PROGRAM OF IBHS

TIME IS MONEY.

OFB-EZ is designed to help small businesses focus on planning for any type of business interruption, so they can get a jump start on recovery, re-open faster, and reduce their losses. A short summary of the 8-step process follows.



Find out more at DisasterSafety.org/open-for-business



KNOW YOUR RISKS

OFB-EZ starts by helping you identify the most serious threats to your business by focusing on what disruptions are most likely to happen, and what the impact would be if they do. This exercise will help you focus your planning on those threats with the highest risk (greatest likelihood X worst disruption).



KNOW YOUR OPERATIONS

To focus your plan on the things that matter most to your bottom line, you also need to identify your key business functions and processes, and decide how long you can go without being able to perform each of them. OFB-EZ helps you do this by giving you a tool to document critical details for each business function, such as how quickly it needs to be restored, the people who perform the function, and who receives the output. As you think about these things, you will be asked to identify any IT resources needed to perform the function and any manual workarounds.



KNOW YOUR EMPLOYEES

Almost every small business relies on its employees to succeed. That is why it is critical to know how to locate your employees after a disaster, make sure they are safe, and let them know about the status of your business operations and how they can get back to work. This can happen only if you have obtained and maintained current contact information for all your employees. OFB-EZ provides a convenient place to record basic employee contact information, as well as options for communicating with employees if phone and power lines are down. It is important to share your communications plans with employees before a disaster strikes.



KNOW YOUR KEY CUSTOMERS, CONTACTS, SUPPLIERS AND VENDORS

Your key customers will want to know that you can provide “business as usual” even if others around you are experiencing difficulties following a disaster. They will want to know if your operations are running, or how soon you will be back in business, as well as the effect of your disruption on them. Having up-to-date contact information for your key customers, contacts, suppliers and vendors is just as important as knowing how to reach your employees. OFB-EZ allows you to create and maintain contact lists and keep them where they are easily accessible.



KNOW YOUR INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Information and information technology are the lifeblood of almost every business. They also are extremely vulnerable to many disruption scenarios, ranging from a localized power outage to a major natural catastrophe. OFB-EZ helps you inventory and document your information technology, including hardware, software, digital data and connectivity. It also reminds users of the importance of frequent back-ups, off-site storage, and restoration options.



KNOW YOUR FINANCES

The time to prepare your business’ finances for a potential disruption is before a disaster occurs. To help business owners do so, OFB-EZ provides a checklist to assist in creating a post-disaster financial strategy, along with an inventory of key financial contacts. Although OFB-EZ is not an insurance program, it provides guidance on how to review your insurance coverage in regards to what is covered, what is not covered, and other available types of coverage.



KNOW WHEN TO UPDATE AND TEST YOUR PLAN

Once you have documented your plan, distributed it, and trained your employees how to use it, you may think you are finished. However, your organization is constantly changing, and so is the environment around it. That’s why it’s important to update and test your plan regularly, using suggestions provided by OFB-EZ. It also is vital to recognize that disaster planning is not only a paper exercise, it needs to actively involve the people you will rely on in a real event. The “power outage” table top exercise in OFB-EZ is an effective way to test your organization’s disaster readiness and learn where you need to improve.



KNOW WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

OFB-EZ is a compact disaster planning tool, but there are many additional resources available that provide further disaster safety recommendations and aid in your recovery after an event. The online toolkit provides contact information for some of these organizations; there may be others in your local community. It’s also a good idea to maintain a communications channel with community leaders; public safety organizations such as the police, fire and emergency medical services; local government agencies; utility companies; and others that may help you with disaster planning or recovery.

No matter what you do, or where you do business, disasters can strike, sometimes without a moment’s notice. OFB-EZ will help you prepare for the unexpected, and respond should it actually occur. But it’s not enough simply to read this article and think about being prepared. Now is the time to download the free OFB-EZ toolkit and start working on the plan that may help you survive, and even thrive, when the disaster you plan for becomes the disaster you recover from.



Find out more at DisasterSafety.org/open-for-business