



Always Changing: Emergency Response Planning and the Evolving All-Hazards Approach

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Crisis management and emergency response planning has long followed an “all-hazards approach.” Tabletop exercises, drills and other kinds of training capitalize on likely threats to prepare organizations and their people before, during and after a crisis event. Based on the probable physical risks to a business’s location, infrastructure or workforce, these threats represent a general understanding of what a crisis is and can be.

The world is rapidly changing. While preparing for an active shooter or severe storm remains paramount to continuing business operations and keeping employees safe, organizations have had to shift emergency response planning to address a series of evolving threats such as cyberattacks, civil unrest and mental health challenges that, only a few years ago, would have been considered hypothetical.

From mass protests to ransomware, organizations across industries can adapt to the new threat landscape by viewing emergency response as a living process that requires regular drilling and training.

Organizations must view emergency response as a living process.

Emergency Response Planning: An Overview

To address the nuances of emergency response, an organization must have a firm grasp on standard operating procedures for crisis events. Best practice has demonstrated that the minimum criteria for an effective disaster program includes:

- A thorough **assessment** of all potential risks and hazards to an organization and each of its locations by emergency response team members such as the incident commander, emergency response coordinator and other relevant stakeholders.
- Using the information from the risk assessment to develop a robust **emergency response plan** that addresses how to mitigate, prepare for, respond to and recover from identified risks and hazards.
- A **crisis communications plan** for managing perception and addressing internal and external stakeholder concerns, public response and media coverage, with a special focus on social media engagement.
- An employee-wide **training program** on the emergency response plan, ideally involving drills and exercises that will test and evaluate the plan on a regular basis.

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Note that emergency response plans are fluid documents. Just as technology advances and the threats specific to a time and place evolve, an emergency response plan should be frequently reviewed and updated. The plan should also be practiced regularly with emergency response teams (and annually with all employees, if possible).

Recent episodes of violence and cyberterrorism, as well as more regular occurrences of public protest and civil unrest, have alerted organizations to the importance of being aware and preparing for the next crisis – whatever it may be. This extends to include sectors that are increasingly associated with specific threats such as mass shootings (K-12 schools), rallies that turn violent (college campuses) and cyberattacks (health care systems).

What can organizations do to ensure their emergency response is comprehensive enough to meet the call of an all-hazards approach, including newer and resurgent crises? Build a plan focusing on three key elements: Risk assessment, plan development and training.

Your emergency response planning should focus on risk assessment, plan development and training.

Vulnerability Risk Assessment

From natural storm activity to subtle dangers like internet phishing, defining the risks that may affect the organization if threatened will prepare it for numerous emergency situations.

A **vulnerability risk assessment** is the process by which organizations and their emergency response teams can understand potential risks (the aforementioned storm or hack), develop criteria to assess these risks (the impact, large or small, on employees, operations and infrastructure), prioritize risks (the impact and likelihood of a particular risk) and identify current vulnerabilities related to each risk.



Any number of things can be at risk: People, locations, infrastructure, electronic presence, off-site facilities and so on. As such, it's critical to measure risks in order to compare and aggregate their impact across the organization. Most businesses use rating scales that allow meaningful differentiation for prioritization of each hazard, emphasizing levels of impact from most likely and most damaging to least likely and least damaging – and everything in-between. Whatever the decision, scales should always consider the impact on people and the organization, the likelihood of occurrence, organizational vulnerability and the speed of onset of each emergency situation.

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Additionally, a **gap analysis** will highlight what an organization currently has developed for mitigating each risk as well as what needs to be put in place as benchmarked against different industry best practices. This allows organizations to fill the “gaps” in their emergency response plans – increasingly important as today's threats evolve and change.

Throughout the entire planning process, an organization should seek to link its emergency response plan and procedures with community resources related to disaster recovery (think first responders or local emergency managers).

In the end, the risk assessment process will make the overall emergency response plan both *strategic* through a greater understanding of the overall risks for the organization and *functional* through the application of immediate and short-term actions. By providing a guide for effective decision-making during an emergency, the organizational impact of a crisis event can be mitigated and the path to recovery made clear.

A Note on Media Coverage

Media coverage during a crisis is an intense experience. Between worldwide media outlets and the local news, the impact of any media response during a crisis can be critical to the preparedness, response and recovery of an organization. This is why many businesses include media coverage as a measurable risk to consider during emergency response planning and take steps to ensure crisis teams are properly trained to handle media activity.

Plan Development and Courses of Action

With a risk assessment and gap analysis completed, the emergency response team can begin the process of plan development in earnest by identifying **courses of action**.

Courses of action address the *who, what, where, why* and *how* for each identified risk, hazard and function. These are very different from **mitigating actions**, or detailed plan descriptions for the overall action an organization can take to mitigate damages resulting from a crisis. Incorporating each course of action will determine if the plan is operational or if there are any notable gaps.

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Courses of action also include criteria for determining how and when each response will be implemented under a variety of circumstances. The emergency response team can subsequently develop response protocols and procedures to support these implementation efforts.

Courses of action are developed using the following steps:

- ✓ **Depicting the scenario.** Creating a potential scenario based on the threats and hazards previously identified and prioritized during the vulnerability risk assessment and gap analysis allows for real-time exploration of the response plan.
- ✓ **Determining the amount of time available for response.** Response time will vary depending on the type of threat or hazard in question as well as the scenario involved. For example, an organization might have days to prepare before a hurricane makes landfall but must respond to a ransomware attack within an immediate and often specific window of time.
- ✓ **Identifying decision points.** As threats or crises unfold, decision points indicate the place in time when leaders anticipate making decisions about a course of action. Walking through every scenario in detail helps identify the relevant decision points for each; in the case of the hurricane, decision points would involve something like choosing between evacuation or sheltering in place.
- ✓ **Creating checklists.** Developing courses of action checklists assists those involved in the emergency response to carry out assigned tasks and responsibilities. Checklists allow responders, including those with less training, to follow easy-to-understand instructions and remain focused throughout the response.

Further, an annual review and edit of an organization's emergency response plan helps create both a robust response strategy and a resilient workforce. Remember, the plan is a living document responding to shifting threats. The more a plan is reviewed, the better prepared an organization can be for any number of crises.

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Training on the Plan

Annual reviews and edits are only part of the equation for creating responsive, functional emergency plans. The other part? As the saying goes: Practice makes perfect.

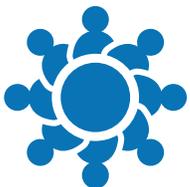
The more an organization practices its emergency response plan, and the more stakeholders are trained on implementation, the more effectively it will be able to act before, during and after a crisis. Training exercises provide opportunities to practice with community partners while also identifying additional gaps or staffing realignment needs crucial to a successful response.

The following exercises offer an overview of training opportunities, but require increasing amounts of planning, time and resources:



DRILLS

Drills test the critical tasks connected to an emergency response. These could include notifying emergency response team members of a crisis, which will also test if their contact information is current; activating the emergency response team and having team members report to their assigned locations; and determining team members' availability and the availability of their backups, or those individuals who serve as replacements should primary team members be unavailable. Critical tasks vary with the organization, so it is best to identify as many as possible and drill as necessary.



TABLETOP EXERCISES

Tabletop exercises typically involve emergency response team members, as needed, walking through a scenario and identifying the necessary courses of action before, during and after an emergency to lessen its impact on the organization and the community. Tabletops help assess the emergency response plan and available resources while facilitating an understanding of emergency management and planning concepts for everyone involved.



FUNCTIONAL EXERCISES

Functional exercises, also known as full-scale exercises, typically involve multiple partners. Community partners and relevant personnel use the actual buildings, infrastructure and grounds to practice responding to emergency scenarios. Participants react to realistic simulated events – a bomb threat or an armed intruder, for instance – and implement the emergency response procedures in place for the organization, local first responders and associated community resources.

By executing a vulnerability risk assessment, integrating it with the emergency response plan and testing the overall capacity of the organization to respond through drills and exercises, your business stands the best chance of recovering from the impact of any crisis event.

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The FEI Difference

For 40 years, FEI has been at the forefront of enhancing workforce resilience by offering a full spectrum of solutions.

Founded in response to an identified need, FEI created the first national networked employee assistance program (EAP). We have since grown to offer vital programming and services in organizational development, workplace violence prevention and crisis management. Our work promotes a highly regarded framework for organizational resilience by integrating behavioral health support and crisis management expertise, establishing FEI as a leader in the field of crisis preparedness, response and recovery.

Any crisis situation, no matter its scale or severity, poses a threat to the well-being of your community. As a result, FEI's committed Crisis Management Department expands on a mission of aiding people in moments of crisis by helping organizations manage incidents that threaten not only the resilience of individuals, but the continuity of organizational operations.

We have a long and distinguished history in providing plan development, benchmarking analysis, crisis consultation and response services following catastrophic events. FEI is uniquely qualified to provide effective crisis management services and emergency response by capitalizing on the following strengths:



- Our crisis management experts possess an average of over 20 years of professional experience. With a wide-ranging background in emergency response planning, training and drills, FEI's seasoned team of professionals has responded to crisis activations of all sizes including 9/11, the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, Hurricane Katrina and Superstorm Sandy.
- We focus on truly integrating strategic crisis management, emergency management and business continuity preparedness plans with the internal capabilities of our clients. No other single provider offers EAP, organizational development, workplace violence prevention and crisis management services to holistically enhance organizational resilience.
- We understand one of the most overlooked yet fundamental aspects of crisis planning: The human element. Every phase of emergency response planning relies on your people; without solid plans in place to address the human recovery challenges of crisis management, emergency response and business continuity, no program can be effective.

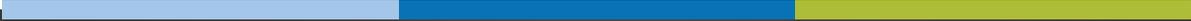
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- Our reputation for creating superior crisis management programs that are customized to customers' individual needs stands as one of the best in the field. FEI developed a specialized model of crisis management services for the aviation industry to support the U.S. Aviation Disaster Family Assistance Act of 1996, the U.S. Foreign Air Carrier Support Act of 1997 and subsequent amendments as well as assisted ASIS International and the British Standards Institute in writing the American National Standard for business continuity.
- FEI's extensive crisis response network of providers is specifically trained in responding to mass disasters and experienced in responding to a range of crises, from those involving individual and small groups to large organizations and communities. Organizations benefit from our global reach in providing universally accepted and culturally sensitive, compassionate care in the aftermath of a disaster or traumatic crisis event. Unlike some larger companies that have enormous staff, FEI will designate a project lead who is right for your project.

FEI has the foundational expertise to prepare your organization for the unthinkable.

From reputational damage to large-scale disasters, FEI has the foundational expertise to prepare your organization for the unthinkable. Remaining a step ahead of the next major crisis – and the next iteration of crisis event – will strengthen your business and protect the human element, ensuring that your organization maintains resilience regardless of circumstance.

FEI is more than a partner; we're invested in the continued success and safety of your entire organization. Let us work towards a resilient future together.



fe*i* workforce resilience



FEI has a 35-year history in enhancing workforce resiliency by offering a full spectrum of solutions, from EAP and organizational development to workplace violence prevention and crisis management. One of the most successful social enterprises in America, FEI was created by the Alliance for Strong Families and Communities, a national network of social sector organizations working to achieve its vision of healthy and equitable society.



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