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With so many hurricanes and natural disasters dominating our headlines these past few months, we can't help but think about how one recovers from such devastating losses. How does one go about rebuilding a business, for example, that has taken many years, even a lifetime to build? The possibility that everything can be destroyed so quickly only reinforces the idea of expecting the unexpected, which is why this issue of *Ask Dr. Freund* focuses on writing your Disaster Recovery Plan as part of your *Emergency Redbook*. Here are some of the questions we have been asked, along with our answers. As always, we welcome your questions and feedback as you address this critical requirement for your business.

Question 1:

Why do I need a Disaster Recovery Plan at all? That's why I have insurance, isn't it? I've got more than enough coverage to rebuild after virtually any imaginable accident or disaster.

...You need a method of saving, storing, and most importantly, having access to your vital records and information after disaster strikes.

Question 2:

I hold regular meetings with my entire staff to stress the importance of safety precautions, evacuation plans, and what to do in the event of a true emergency or disaster? Why does everything have to be written down?

...Your Disaster Recovery Plan needs to be recorded, IN WRITING, in an *Emergency Redbook* that should be given to management and key personnel and kept within arm's reach.

A: Yes, your business insurance policies will indeed cover damage or loss to your facility from fire, explosion, flood, storm, and a host of other unforeseen occurrences. It will also probably cover your building's contents, inventory, and even personal injuries sustained by you or your employees. But what happens if your customer files, accounting data, proprietary software, or intellectual property is destroyed? These are the losses that are truly devastating and from which a business may never recover. You need a method of saving, storing, and most importantly, having access to this vital information *after* disaster strikes. Which is why you need to address these important tasks now, before the unexpected occurs.

A: You don't really have a Disaster Recovery Plan until it is in writing. You simply can't expect to rely on the memories of your employees to perform the emergency procedures you discussed in a meeting months ago. You also can't expect them all to keep track of your memo on evacuation procedures, which may have been haphazardly filed when that next important task arose. The fact that your employees may be asked to respond and perform during an actual emergency or disaster only reduces the chances of things getting done the way they should. Remember, *their* safety and the survival of *your* business may be at stake. Your Disaster Recovery Plan needs to be recorded, IN WRITING in an *Emergency Redbook* that should be given to management and key personnel and kept within arm's reach. This information should also be accessible on-line in the event hard copies are not available during or after a disaster that damages the work facility.

Question 3:

What information should my *Emergency Redbook* include?

... For starters, the names, phone numbers and contact information for all key employees in your company should be included in your *Emergency Redbook*, along with their respective roles and responsibilities during a crisis.

A: For starters, the names, phone numbers and contact information for all key employees in your company should be included in your *Emergency Redbook*, along with their respective roles and responsibilities during a crisis. More specifically, you need to identify a key decision maker and the person next-in-charge should that first person be unavailable or unable to fulfill his or her role. These individuals should have the authority and, more importantly, the ability to interact efficiently with police, fire, or civil defense professionals. You should also consider their ability to speak with the media. In a time of crisis it is critical for *everyone* to know exactly who is in charge.

In addition, you need to document your key systems and criticality of each so that business processes can be reconstructed, if necessary. You also need to identify where your crisis management or command center will be located, as well as a contingency site where administrative personnel could meet. Additionally, you need to identify and document how your vital data would be protected, retrieved, recovered, and accessed. This is the basic information your *Emergency Redbook* should contain. The size and scope of your business will largely determine how much more needs to be included.

Question 4:

This sounds like a lot of information and a lot of work. How long should it take to compile and write our Disaster Recovery Plan and *Emergency Redbook*?

... You can expect the entire process of writing your Disaster Recovery Plan and *Emergency Redbook* to take at least 1-2 months.

A: Once you commit to writing your *Emergency Redbook*, we recommend you assign the task to a small committee of employees who will be responsible for data gathering and the subsequent writing, reviewing, printing, and/or uploading the completed document. The process will also involve some meetings with management to discuss the answers to questions that may not have been previously addressed. It is critical that the question list be as comprehensive as possible. You can expect the entire process of writing your Disaster Recovery Plan and *Emergency Redbook* to take at least 1-2 months, assuming meetings are held and information is communicated in a timely fashion.

Question 5:

My employees already have enough work to do without having to give them yet another project, especially one so important. Is there an alternative?

... You can outsource the project to a firm that has experience in writing *Emergency Redbooks* for companies of all sizes.

A: Yes, You can outsource the project to a firm that has experience in writing *Emergency Redbooks* for companies of all sizes. This firm will certainly have the question lists, templates, and some basic recovery procedures already outlined. After setting up a meeting with management and key personnel to conduct Q & A sessions, the document can be customized for your specific business. The outsourcing firm will also keep you on schedule with a timeline for the exchange and review of information so that your *Emergency Redbook* is completed as quickly and efficiently as possible. The peace of mind that accompanies the completion of this critical business task will allow you to focus on doing what you do best: running your company.