

## Tornado Response and Recovery

**Lines of Business:** Property, General Liability, Public Officials Liability, Workers Compensation, Auto

**Risk Control Strategy/Key Issues:** To establish an active program of preparation and response to a potential storm event.

### Suggested Policy Elements:

1. A response policy statement should be written to establish protocols and procedures for inclusion in a catastrophe response program. These controls should be implemented throughout the facilities under the control of the organization. The policy should establish management's commitment to minimizing losses and assign responsibility and accountability for the policy to a single individual. Additional personnel may be needed to implement the policy, but a single person should be assigned the authority to implement the organization's plan of action.
  - Establish a command center as a central reference point before and after the storm to deal with emergencies or general questions. Remember, people respond differently during an emergency. Some will be calm and well organized. Others will be neither and will show extreme signs of stress and disorientation.
  - Before the storm, your disaster plan should create a quick response team to address recovery issues or sudden unplanned for emergencies that may develop. This team should include experts in different areas if possible. These may include power transmission, building maintenance, machinery maintenance, etc.
  - Prior to the beginning of the storm season, you should pre-qualify contractors in your area that may be used in the event of a storm. These contractors should be pre-committed to your organization via a letter, statement or contract. If you do not gain their prior commitment, you may not be able to obtain the assistance you need from them, as others may be willing to pay considerably more to have their problems handled first, meaning you may have to wait in line or pay more.
  - Once you receive commitments from contractors, you should obtain emergency phone numbers of the top executives at these firms. You should obtain both their office and home numbers to facilitate communication. Time is a precious commodity in the time of an emergency. The faster the response time, the more effectively losses can be minimized.
  - Have a line of credit or other means of payment established with all contractors. Cash speaks loudly during times of a crisis, but a line of credit backed by your organization's credibility can speak louder. Establishing a relationship before the incident solidifies the obligation to honor a contractual link between the public and private sector during any time of crisis. This will ease doing business and avoid price increases needed to get the job done in an emergency.
  - Security provided by local authorities (police or sheriff--county, parish local and state, fire departments, and National Guard units) can be essential in these times. Emergency action plans utilizing these resources or notifying them of situations that may develop can be a critical component to your program if necessary. It is better to plan for a contingency and not need the assistance of local authorities than to need help and not know how to obtain it.
  - Communication will be a problem during and after a storm. Two way radios and portable telephones may be an alternative if antennas and relay equipment are not too severely damaged. These devices may be made operational faster than telephone lines.

- Know your facilities operational needs from a utility standpoint. If emergency generators are in place, know your fuel capacity and where you can obtain additional fuel quickly. If you will need emergency generators, you should make arrangements for where they can be obtained. Again, commitments should be made for the availability or purchase of the equipment before a storm season. You should also have a shut down plan in effect for utilities in each facility.
- Establish a resource directory for services in surrounding areas that could provide additional assistance in the event of an emergency. Obtain phone numbers and contact names of individuals who can commit resources to you in case a storm exceeds your planning. Update your directory prior to the start of each storm season to keep it as current as possible.
- Potable water will be needed at your facilities, especially if they are designated as disaster shelters. Make plans prior to the storm season as to where water supplies can be obtained and the estimated quantity that will be needed. No domestic water supplies should be used until tested and certified by the local health department as safe.
- If you have Internet access, you can obtain storm tracking information through the Weather Underground web site. The address is <http://www.wunderground.com/tornado/>

**After a storm has subsided, recovery work should follow an established recovery plan. This plan should contain the following:**

- 1) Secure your site or sites within the impacted area using input from structural engineers or local authorities having jurisdiction. Buildings that show structural damage should not be entered until inspected and found to be sound enough to permit access. Only qualified and licensed individuals with experience in this type of assessment should conduct building inspections.
- 2) Before turning on the electrical power, check all circuit panels, breakers, bus bars, and any exposed wiring. Electrical shock hazards and fires may result if the system is not in proper operating condition before it is energized.
- 3) Evaluate the area for safety hazards, including downed live wires, leaking flammable gas, leaking flammable liquids, or animals seeking shelter. In fact, the natural response of animals, snakes, or reptiles is to seek shelter during or after a storm. A pile of rubble, open building, shed, or other areas may contain a traumatized pet or wild animal. They can react strongly if surprised or cornered. Care should be taken and, advice should be provided to response teams on what they need to do in these situations. Local animal control officers or veterinarians may be a resource on these issues. Obtain and keep their numbers in your emergency command center and update them prior to each storm season.
- 4) Evaluate your surrounding area. If you discover people with injuries, qualified personnel should render assistance while emergency medical services are called. At all times, any personnel rendering assistance should use Universal Precautions as published by the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia.
- 5) Protect your facilities from further damage. Take steps necessary to protect structures and contents from further exposure to the elements. Tarp or cover roof holes where possible. Board up broken windows, doors, etc. to reduce additional exposure to rain, wind, or persons seeking unlawful access to your facility. Check roof drains for debris and un-block them as necessary
- 6) If possible, begin clean up procedures quickly. Losses and damage can be controlled to some degree by drying out or cleaning up damaged equipment and property as soon as possible. Your disaster planning for the recovery of damaged material should include electronic data equipment and software. Clean and dry vital pieces of equipment first.
- 7) If you have sprinklers in any facility, check them to see if they are operational. If they have been damaged, determine how to get them back on-line as quickly as possible.

- 8) Monitor cleanup activities of outside contractors. If salvage or repair requires cutting or welding work, you should have a policy to establish fire watches. Require contractors to share the responsibility for safe operational conditions during clean up and recovery operations.
- 9) Wherever possible, remove standing water from around your facilities. Consider dehumidifying your facility and placing air movers where sensitive equipment is located or where essential documents or valuable papers, art work, etc., are stored.

#### **Incident Command System/Unified Command:**

Use your emergency command system for this occurrence as you would for any catastrophic occurrence. Use the Unified command structure should the storm cross boundaries or multiple entities including state and federal respond to the incident.

#### **First Responders:**

Remember your first responders will have family that they will feel responsible for as well as the overall public. In such an emergency, your policy will need to be flexible to allow them to make sure their family is safe as well as the general public or you may have a breakdown in services.

#### **Media:**

Have your media representative drill on communication site set-up and communicate with local media outlets where the information will be disseminated to them. Establish an understanding that information will be released here for the media's use. This will give them a starting point and potentially minimize untrained personnel from giving misleading statements or response progress.

#### **HAZUS:**

Use the planning tools and programs to determine potential incidents and assist on planning response efforts. <http://www.fema.gov/plan/prevent/hazus/index.shtm>

#### **Program Activities Calendar:**

- Annual Compliance Audit
- Annual Emergency Drill
- (Schools/Universities/Colleges) Annual Training first quarter of Fiscal Year or School Year
- Annual Records Compliance Review

#### **Web Site Links:**

- Federal Emergency Management Agency  
<http://www.fema.gov>
- Ready – Business Preparedness  
<http://www.ready.gov/tornadoes>

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**Mitigation Example:**

***Floyd County Prepares Citizens for Future Disasters with New Mass Alert System***

**Floyd County, GA** - Located northwest of Atlanta just at the Georgia-Alabama state line, Floyd County has a long history of severe weather events. One of the more recent events, an Enhanced Fujita Scale EF3 tornado, struck the town just after noon on Saturday, March 15, 2008. This tornado cut a half-mile swath across Polk, Floyd, and Bartow counties with winds estimated at 150 miles per hour. The devastation in Floyd County included one fatality, two injuries, the total destruction of five homes, major damage to seven homes, and minor damage to five homes. Many residents and county officials decided after this event that they needed an advance warning system for severe weather in order to mitigate future losses.

Floyd County has had seven Presidential Disaster Declarations since 1990 as a result of flooding, tornadoes, severe thunderstorms, and severe ice storms. The county has weathered through 67 severe thunderstorm events, 20 flood events, and 16 severe winter weather events in just the past 10 years. The area residents have also witnessed the devastating destruction of 12 tornadoes within the last 50 years.

Given the area's history of hazards Floyd County decided to apply for funds through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) to furnish a mass alert system that would mitigate future risks for the area's residents. The mitigation activity they chose, the Covered Weather Warning system, is a geographically based notification system that notifies residents of approaching dangers by calling their phones. It requires the citizens to register their addresses with their phone numbers so the system can notify them according to their geographical location. After receiving FEMA's approval for their mass alert system project through the HMGP program, the county immediately began implementing the scope of work outlined in their application.

When the county first inquired about a hazard mitigation grant for a mass alert system, there was no idea how quickly the system would be put to use or how popular it would be with the residents. To announce the system's activation on March 24, 2009, over 28,600 calls to citizens were made.

As of July 15, 2009 a total of 9,195 Floyd County phone numbers were registered to receive the mass alert calls. Since its activation, the county has utilized the system a total of 125 times, mainly for severe weather and tornado warnings. By the time it relayed its very first alert for a severe thunderstorm warning within the first 24 hours of operation, many citizens had already signed up for the service.

Scotty Hancock, the Floyd County Emergency Management Director comments, "We were amazed at the response we received from the installation of this system. So many residents were so appreciative of the warning calls to their phones in the hours after the initial launch. More than a month after the implementation of this system, I am still hearing people thank the county for investing in this system; not one negative comment so far. We have been extremely impressed with this and hope to expand services in the future."

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