

## **Tabletop Exercise**

The below scenario is designed as a tabletop exercise and is a useful tool for discussing how your business continuity plans might be employed in an emergency; in this instance a large-scale flood that causes significant damage and disruption. Incidents involving fire, flood and disease are far more likely to impact your business than terrorism which is comparatively rare.

The notes below are neither prescriptive or exhaustive so you will still require tailored response measures for your organisation.

### **Part 1**

*You're in a training seminar when your mobile phone rings from someone at your workplace. When you take the call you are informed that a major water main in the road outside your business has burst and has rapidly flooded your premises. The water level is still rising and already half a meter high in your building. The caller has left the building and is at the end of the road calling you.*

*The emergency services are not yet on the scene.*

### **Points to consider:**

What are your priorities?

- Are the staff in the premises safe? Has the power been isolated?
- Do you advise staff to save important documents and IT equipment such as laptops before they are forced to evacuate? This may depend on how safe it would be to do so.
- If staff have been evacuated, are they at an evacuation point or have they gone home? If they have gone home how are going to contact them – do you have their phone numbers to hand as they may not be picking up emails whilst away from the office?
- Protection of IT infrastructure and back-up data – notify your IT department/contractor.

What are your immediate actions?

- Call the emergency services – don't assume that they have been, it will do no harm to call them and report the flood even if somebody else has already done so.
- Are you needed at the scene, can you manage this remotely whilst at the seminar? Some of these decisions might be affected by how long it would take you to travel back to your workplace and even whether you can access the building should you arrive (a cordon may be in place for instance or access is physically impossible).
- Appoint an incident manager if it isn't going to be yourself.

Do your staff know what to do?

- Were they made aware of the business continuity plan (BCP) and related procedures during their induction?
- Is there anyone you can delegate to whilst you're not on site?

Do you have, or can you access the resources or information that you might need?

- Can you access your BCP? The hard copy is in the building that is no longer accessible, can you retrieve a digital copy? Consider carrying a hard copy with you when away from your workplace.

## **Part 2**

*It's now an hour after the call and you are at the scene with the person who called you. You cannot access your premises as the water main is not yet isolated. The emergency services are on scene and it's clear that the flooding is extensive and is affecting a large area. Your premises are at the centre of the affected area which is now flooded to a depth of around a meter.*

### **Points to consider:**

Do you know what services your business is due to provide within the next 24 hours? What will be the effect if you can't open tomorrow?

- Are there meetings or deliveries that will have to be cancelled? Are there clients/customers that need to be notified of disruption? Shared staff calendars are useful for this.
- There could be reputational/brand damage that needs to be minimised.

Can you contact those suppliers/customers that may be affected by your closure?

- Where are their contact details stored?
- PR/external communications teams may need to be briefed and a strategy put together to minimise reputational damage (especially if you're a customer facing organisation such as a hotel).

Is it possible for you to operate from an alternative location?

- Do you have a dedicated disaster recovery workspace or a separate office/branch?
- If the above is not an option, could you make arrangements with neighbouring businesses in advance who would be able to provide you with temporary workspace?
- Are staff able to work from home? If you have remote working can staff access it from their personal computers at home or do they need company laptops (which may have been destroyed in the flood)?
- Redirect phone calls.

**Part 3**

*It's now the following weekend. The burst main has been repaired and the flood water has gone.*

*Your premises has been flooded to just under a meter in depth which includes both the flood water and all the street debris picked up in the flood – anything below the waterline that is perishable is a complete loss. The building itself will require extensive drying out and refurbishment and will take weeks to be ready for business again.*

**Points to consider:**

If you have lost paper or digital records did you have back-up copies?

- Digital copies can be stored off site (cloud computing or separately located server), paper records scanned and digitised.

How are you keeping staff informed?

- A full staff de-brief may be needed to ensure everyone understands their responsibilities - whilst some team members can go back to their day-to-day work, others may be tasked with managing repairs to the damaged premises (liaising with contractors, purchasing new equipment, dealing with insurance companies etc).
- Email works best during normal working hours, however outside of office hours it isn't very reliable as it may not be checked.
- Are staff willing to provide you with their personal contact details so you can speak to them out of hours or whilst working from a different location? Some may not.
- A WhatsApp group is one method although is it appropriate? It does not incorporate a mechanism to log messages or retrieve them should they be lost or deleted so there is no trail of accountability.
- Mass messaging platforms such as Everbridge and PageOne are designed for emergency communications.
- Perhaps communicate only with senior managers and rely on them to cascade.

How is your insurance company reacting?

- Do you fully understand what your insurance policy does/doesn't cover? This is especially true concerning acts of terrorism.
- Cashflow – do you have reserves that can be used whilst waiting for an insurance claim to pay out?
- There may be a dispute with the insurer depending on who is to blame for the flood; it will play out differently if it's a burst pipe in your building compared to a main owned by Thames Water.
- Even if you have comprehensive and complete insurance cover what would be the effect if your business was unable to operate for even a few days?