

Disaster Recover 101 Reducing the Impact of Water-Damage Events

By Tom McGuire

Fortunately, most building owners and facility managers will never experience a major catastrophe that appears on CNN or The Weather Channel. Nonetheless, thousands of commercial and industrial buildings each year are damaged by unforeseen events such as a burst water pipe, seepage, fire sprinkler flooding or cascades of water from a rainstorm. These more common events happen without even creating a blip on the media radar.

Whenever such an event occurs, the results can be operationally and financially disastrous. Potential risks include destruction of interior structural materials and equipment; files disruption; further damage from humidity; and, if water is not abated quickly, microbial damage.

When an incident occurs, two important elements are required—a quick response and a professional recovery. Securing a restoration professional will help alleviate what industry insiders call the “the disaster after the disaster.” Doing so requires careful planning and understanding of factors that include:

- Having a disaster recovery plan in

place

- Designating first responders
- Responding quickly to minimize damage

- Stabilizing and drying the facility
- The restoration of materials

Plan in Advance of Disaster

Never underestimate the power of planning. The best insurance against catastrophic loss of vital documents and other materials is to be prepared in advance. Having a Disaster Recovery Plan (DRP) in place is essential to a successful recovery process, and can limit the extent of damage by defining and prioritizing the recovery steps.

A DRP also designates the professional disaster restoration services provider you will summon when an incident occurs. A professional responder will guide you through the development of a recovery plan free of charge. You also can utilize the web to find examples of recovery plans in use by companies like yours.

Designate First Response Team

First, one cannot manage a disaster recovery by committee. A committee may waste hours trying to make a decision at a time when there is not a second to waste.

Select a leader at the company who is both a level-headed decision maker and someone that your team will respect to lead the recovery operation. Then, surround the lead decision maker with a team of first responders who will spring into action to get the job done. Avoid the “warm body” syndrome of making everyone participate; some people may not want to play a part, or the disaster may have affected their home and they have their own issues to face.

Secure pre-loss agreements with expert contractors prior to the event. However, avoid agreements that cost you money, as a reputable restoration company will not charge for this service.

With a DRP in place, you will have on speed dial an experienced restoration firm that can get to work immediately. It is a good idea to have relationships with several firms in case a future disaster is widespread and the company you selected cannot respond in time.

Also, keep in mind that during a widespread event, key items such as power generators may be difficult to obtain. It is very important for the professional restoration firm you choose in your recovery plan to have the ability to provide power. However, as a backup, be sure to identify a generator company you can contact if needed.

Know Insurance Coverage

Know your insurance coverage limits. It is your responsibility to mitigate the loss in the first hours. Be sure to document all of the damage by taking pictures and video of the damaged materials. Do not throw anything out without documentation and inventory. Remember, it may be several days before

your insurance adjuster arrives, so the critical first steps are your responsibility.

Respond Quickly After Event

An immediate response is required after a catastrophic event to stabilize the loss and mitigate damage. Activate your team and your professional consultant as soon as possible. Doing so will maximize recovery of all contents such as inventory, machinery, furniture, carpeting, documents and files, and will minimize replacement costs, preserve good indoor air quality and control mold risks. Implement water extraction, if needed, and clean up immediately with your professional responders.

It is very important to involve your drying contractor after a water damage event to help assess which items are worth restoration and which are better replaced. For example, replace damaged items that have lower costs associated with replacement. On the other hand, items that are difficult to replace or have a very high replacement cost validate the restoration effort.

Stabilize, Dry the Building

Your professional restoration partner will recommend the most effective option to stabilize the building by utilizing industrial dehumidifiers and qualified technicians.

As stabilization of the building is underway, the document recovery process, as needed, can commence. A restoration expert should provide you with the following services: vacuum freeze drying, desiccant air drying, blast freezing, and comprehensive cleaning.

Continued on page 14



DP
 DYNA-PLATE, INC.
 SPECIALIZING IN QUALITY ZINC BARREL PLATING

Disaster Recover 101

Continued from page 12

An experienced provider will quickly identify the best recovery method for a particular material, based on the value of the documents and the level of damage. For example, in the right circumstances, freezing documents can greatly reduce the time and cost of restoration.

To prevent further damage, water-damaged vital documents must be stabilized or frozen as soon as possible. Books must be packed out with the spine down, packed tightly, and stored immediately in temperatures below -20 degrees F.

A professional restoration company will provide skilled technicians to manage these processes and provide daily reports documenting the progress and success of the recovery project. It's essential you feel comfortable with their services, and they should be the light at the end of the tunnel of the recovery process.

Know Your Expectations

Some delicate items, such as paper, will never return to pre-loss condition. Staining may remain on some pages, and there may be a little wrinkling after the drying process is complete. This is a nat-

ural result of the drying process and water-damaged paper in general. However, as long as the information is saved, then copies can be made of the originals and the originals can be safely stored until needed.

Planning is Key

When it comes to the continuity of the business, your top priorities are personnel, business data and the physical building. By developing a few critical plans before a disaster occurs and then by working closely with a drying contractor, you can reduce the interruption to your business, limit costs to only what is necessary, and reduce the potential for more serious problems later. Following the procedures detailed in this article will help building owners, facility managers and others avoid the "disaster after the disaster."

Tom McGuire is president and managing director of The Solutions Company, LLC, a Florida-based disaster recovery company specializing in professional project management of vital document recovery, structural decontamination and expert project consulting services. For more information on The Solutions Company, visit www.thesolutionscompany.us.com.