

## **Disaster Recovery Plan**

Disaster can come in many forms and can result in the loss of some or all; people, buildings and contents, paper and computer files. Businesses that have not taken Risk Management seriously can find it impossible to recover from a disaster.

The Disaster Recovery plan (DRP) should be designed to assist a firm in dealing with complex problems even if parties and staff are personally traumatised by the loss sustained.

### **A. The DRP should be:**

1. Available. A current copy should be kept out with the office at all times. It's no use under a pile of rubble or locked in a secure place which cannot be accessed at say, a weekend
2. Up-to-date.
3. Simple to follow.
4. Structured by a responsible person to allow sections to be worked on in parallel.
5. Prioritised to cover the most important items first.
6. Agreed and understood by all managers.

### **B. The DRP should cover:**

1. The unplanned absence of a partner or fee earner (incl. Financial Services Managers, etc.) due to short or long term illness or death.
  - a. Immediate response - The person's manager, normally a partner, will establish work-in-progress and matters needing immediate action. The understudy selected for each section of the absent persons work will be named in the DRP as will the name of his / her understudy. Transferring work to others in the firm may cause stress if their workload is not properly managed. This process underlines the need for diaries, whether on paper or computer, to be kept up to date and available.
  - b. Secondary response - The partnership agreement and / or job description relating to the absent person will be available and the DRP should define the options available to the partners i.e. recruitment, promotion of another, etc. This information may already be held elsewhere but remember that it may not be available.

The DRP should also identify any person or organisation required to help in the process. Including a list of contact names, telephone

numbers and addresses will save time. Again having this information available quickly, is important.

2. The unplanned absence of more than one partner or fee earner (incl. Financial Services Managers, etc.) or a combination of the above due to short or long term illness or death.

The difficulties here are compounded by the possible quantity of the work to be taken on by others and the possible effect on their performance and health. In addition to the issues outlined in 1., above, the DRP should offer options on how this particular circumstance might be handled. It may be that a locum could be employed or that work could be transferred to another or perhaps several other firms on a temporary basis. Whatever option or combination of options is adopted have a list of the pre-selected (this is no time for a 'beauty parade) names / firms and the relevant contact information.

3. The loss of a building or part of a building.

Immediate action depends on when it happens, (day, night or weekend) and the amount of damage done. The DRP should therefore plan for all reasonable foreseeable possibilities.

An Overnight incident will probably generate a telephone call to a key holder who might turn-out to assess the damage or may be required to summon one or more of the partners. The DRP should provide contact information. The key holder may in the case of minor problems i.e. broken windows, burst pipes, etc. be authorised to employ tradesmen without recourse to a partner. The DRP should list the Trades people pre-selected to deal with each problem likely to be encountered along with the required contact information.

Incidents of a more serious nature will probably require the attendance of the Senior or Managing partner with the authority to take decisions on expenditure. The DRP will advise the key holder of the person(s) to contact and provide contact details.

Insurance companies should be advised as soon as possible and it may be necessary to have an Architect and / or Civil Engineer investigate the condition of a building as the structure may be unstable and it may be unsafe to enter. The power and lighting systems may also have become dangerous. Again the DRP should identify pre-selected professionals and provide contact details.

If the incident happens during the night it may be practical to contact staff before they leave for work and instruct some or all staff to stay at home until further notice. Again the DRP should contain contact information.

If a major incident occurs during working hours then the staff marshalled out of the building may have no means of getting home as handbags and coats may have been left within the building. Some staff may require hospital treatment. The DRP should set down who is to deal with the personnel aspects

of the disaster and if it is necessary to incur transport costs etc., to get staff safely home, sufficient authority should be vested in the person to ensure this is done as quickly and efficiently as possible, the DRP should include contact information for next of kin.

A damaged building may be a magnet for thieves so if it cannot be made lock-tight, contact a pre-selected security guarding company and arrange for it to patrol the building when it is safe for them to do so. Staff evacuated from the building may have left bags with credit cards etc. If it is not possible to retrieve them, staff should be advised to stop them by contacting their bank or other card provider.

At the end of the first day, 24 hours after the start of the incident, it should have been possible to give all partners and staff a brief report on the condition of the buildings and what is required of them.

The DRP should set down options regarding the accommodation available should the current offices not be recoverable quickly. Some may be able to work from home. In the major cities business centres may provide short or long term arrangements. The local Enterprise Company may be able to suggest alternatives.

The DRP should include the replacement of computers, copiers, other office equipment and furniture. Computer wiring networks will likely need replacement or repair and this should also be detailed. The data should be replaceable either from back-ups retrieved from the media safe or from those stored off-site.

The firm's paper files may have been lost to fire or may have suffered water damage. The DRP should include details of companies equipped to dry correspondence with minimum damage to the data. Arrangements to protect diaries should have been in place and so appointments and appearances should still be possible.

## **Conclusion**

The DRP must be based on good Risk Management and should detail the alternative paths to business continuity. The risk management paper in the manual attempts to reduce or remove risks and where this is not possible, to put in place protective measures which will ensure business continuation is possible. Importantly, the DPR identifies people and services pre-selected as being competent to assist. It also lists the persons within the firm who will have responsibility for utilising these services.

Preparing a DRP is time consuming, but if a major disaster does befall you it will be time and money well spent.