



BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLANNING: **FIRST STEPS FOR MUNICIPALITIES**

Submitted by the Manitoba Emergency Measures Organization (EMO)

A chemical spill has forced the evacuation of part of your community. A burst water pipe has flooded the municipal office. Half of your equipment operators have the flu and can't come to work.

These seem like three very different scenarios, but from the perspective of the people who depend on you, they're not. Whatever has caused a disruption, the people who depend on you are only concerned about whether you can deliver the services they require.

Business Continuity Planning (BCP) is emergency preparedness focused on the delivery of your minimally essential services. Many municipalities are growing increasingly concerned about business disruptions, especially in context of pandemic planning. An investment in BCP will provide your municipality with the starting points to prepare, respond and recovery from disruptions as severe as a public health emergency or as routine as a winter storm.

FLEXIBLE, ADAPTABLE PLANS

BCP is based on 'all-hazard' emergency preparedness principles, which are based on generic and flexible preparations that can be adapted to suit a wide range of events. This is fundamentally different than an approach based on a specific hazard, which will be of limited value should an actual emergency differ from your planning scenario.

While BCPs can be developed in many ways, the following methodology is widely accepted and promoted as best practices:

- *Risk Assessment:* Start by identifying the vulnerability and impact of a variety of

hazards to your municipal operations. This will help focus the services your office will need to deliver during serious events, and also identify priority concerns when you're able to develop more specific plans.

- *Business Impact Analysis:* A Business Impact Analysis should identify three critical points – what minimal services your municipality will need to perform during a disruption, how quickly those services need to be delivered, and what resources are required.
- *Priorities for Restoration:* During a major disruption, you may need to make decisions on what gets done now and what can wait. A Priorities for Restoration list will provide a guideline for making these decisions.
- *Strategy Development:* There's more than one way to solve a problem. In this step, get your staff thinking about the different ways to deal with a disruption, not only the first approach that comes to mind.
- *Plan Development:* Once you've decided what needs to be done and when and how, it's time to write the plan. Your plan should be simple, easy-to-follow, and identify the jobs that need to be done and who will do them. It should include procedures for activation, the chain-of-command, and contact information for employees, the general public, media, and key stakeholders.
- *Training and Exercises:* Your BCP is only as good as the people who will be using it – be sure to follow-up your investment with training, education, and exercises.

WHEN IT'S ALL DONE

The contents of your BCP are, in a sense, fairly simple – they describe the minimal services required by your municipality, when it needs to be done, who is going to do it, and how they are going to do it. If you can cover those basic points, you're in very good shape.

With that completed, you can start looking at areas that are a specific concern, either because their impact or probability would be high. One example that people are especially concerned about is a pandemic influenza.

BCP AND PANDEMIC PLANNING

Developing a BCP does not mean you have a pandemic plan, but it will give you a good starting point for developing a pandemic plan. This is not an easy task, but the pandemic threat has been well researched, and provides a good foundation for specific planning around a public health emergency.

The Province recommends planning assumptions that suggest half of all people will be unable to come to work over a period of about eight weeks, 35% of people may be sick, and 3% of people may die. Although there will be serious societal impacts if this happens, it is very hard to predict what these will be – don't let this stop you from taking your BCP and developing a pandemic plan. The services you presently provide are what your ratepayers will continue to expect, so focus on these in your plan. There will always be unknowns in a disaster, but that shouldn't stop us from working on things that we know require attention. \$

GETTING STARTED

Here are some resources that provide a starting point in developing your BCP:

www.manitobaemo.ca – The provincial government's agency responsible for emergency management has a number of resources on preparedness and BCP issues.

www.gov.mb.ca/emo/bcp.pdf – An overview presentation from Manitoba EMO on BCP from a municipal perspective.

www.drie.org – Disaster Recovery Information Exchange is an international, not-for-profit organization of BCP professionals. The Central Region Chapter, based in Winnipeg, is a tremendous resource for developing contacts and learning more.

www.dri.ca – Disaster Recovery Institute provides education, training, and the promotion of best practices for BCP.

www.gov.mb.ca/pandemic – General information from the provincial government on pandemic planning.

www.nfpa.org – National Fire Prevention Association standard 1600 is becoming widely accepted as the best practice for emergency and business continuity planning. A copy of 1600 can be downloaded for free, and includes an outline of recommended elements in your BCP.



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