

The Business Continuity Planning Lessons Amid Helene and Milton - Investment News

Monday, October 14, 2024

Clipped from: <https://www.investmentnews.com/practice-management/the-business-continuity-planning-lessons-amid-helene-and-milton/257662>



First hurricane Helene smashed the Southeast, destroying homes and businesses. Not long after, hurricane Milton retraced some of her catastrophic path, adding to both the human toll and billions of dollars of devastation.

Taken together, the [lethal storms](#) made business owners nationwide, including wealth managers, rethink their business continuity plans.

Marc Fischer, director of business services at Procyon Partners, for example, says he keeps an emergency response plan in place that is shared with all his staff members and is implemented in the event of an emergency or natural disaster. It summarizes Procyon's system backup procedures, how to access systems remotely, and what to do in the event of emergencies.

"We've found one of the most important considerations is to maintain lines of communication. For that reason, we have email distribution lists, of course, but we also have an intranet where we post critical information," said Fischer.

Fischer says his intranet app is also accessible via mobile phone and the landing page has a scrolling bar for crucial alerts. Perhaps most importantly, when he posts critical information, the system can override any communications filter a user may have configured. In other words, the post will not be on the intranet, but hit every email inbox, and notify users on their smartphones as well.

With regard to advising the firm's clients about emergency planning, Fischer says it boils down to the individual client and their own comfort level.

"One of our founding partners is a proponent of the 'Red Folder.' This is a simple red manilla folder, kept in a strong box, and includes all the most important information which would be absolutely vital to have at one's fingertips if the head of the household died or became severely incapacitated," said Fischer, adding that all family members should know how to access the Red Folder and "need to practice retrieving it from time to time."

Elsewhere, Brent Weiss, head of financial wellness at Facet, says it's the duty of a financial planner to make sure clients and staff are prepared for [hurricanes](#), wildfires, or other catastrophic emergencies.

"Helping our members grow their money and build wealth is important, and it's just as important to help them protect it and, maybe more importantly, the people they care about most," said Weiss. "If you aren't having these conversations with your clients or members, take the time to do it. Not only will you help them with an essential piece of their overall plan, but you'll position yourself as their trusted partner for years to come."

In other words, disaster planning is good business too.

And as a Floridian who lives only 50 miles from where [hurricane Milton](#) made landfall, Weiss has firsthand experience in dealing with natural disasters.

"We often think they will never happen to us, but they do. And they test our emotions and our relationships. Losing everything or even just something small can have a profound impact on the way we look at the world. In those moments, having a plan can be the thing that gives you hope. Homes can be rebuilt and things can be rebought if you plan properly, but knowing you have a plan for you, your family, and everything you work so hard for can be priceless," said Weiss.

Knowing the specific risks is an important step as well, he said. In Florida, for example, hurricane risk is high, while in California, the risk of earthquakes would be a primary concern. In areas with known risks, one can generally get insurance for protection against a natural disaster.

"Talk to a property and casualty insurance agent to determine what type of coverage is offered, what you need, and the cost of the protection. In some areas, you may need special coverage. As an example, a flood is not covered under a regular homeowners insurance policy, and you will need to get a separate policy to cover any losses," Weiss said.

Another tip from Weiss is for business owners and homeowners to take and store videos of their properties. It will help expedite the claims process since you'll have a more accurate accounting of things for your insurance company.

"This might sound silly, but one of the best and easiest ways to prepare for an insurance claim is to take a video of your home. Turn on the camera and walk around your house both inside and out to document what you own and the state of your home before any event occurs," said Weiss.

Meanwhile, Scott Victoria, COO at TradePMR, says his firm is markedly attentive to emergency preparedness considering its Florida location. He says the firm has a response team that has representation from all facets of the business to ensure that all aspects are covered including clients, employees, compliance, legal, operations, and technology.

"We have a robust Business Continuity Plan (BCP) that is regularly reviewed and tested so that our staff are well-versed in emergency procedures. This plan includes clear communication protocols and ensuring that our employees have access to the necessary resources in the event of an evacuation," said Victoria.

He adds that the company also invested in cloud-based systems and redundant infrastructure, allowing their employees to securely access our platforms from anywhere, whether that's for evacuation support or for

setting up remote work environments in advance of any storms.

Mason Salit, chief talent officer at Dynasty Financial Partners, says the company has a business continuity team that meets regularly and updates their emergency plan when necessary. The team includes senior leaders from technology, operations, finance, marketing, HR, and compliance. For Helene and Milton, Salit said the emergency team got ahead of the storms, tracking their paths in order to ensure they had plans in place.

"For Milton, we started having meetings and communicating with the Dynasty Team on Saturday, Oct. 5. By Sunday, Oct. 6, we had already told the team that we wanted everyone to work from a safe place," said Salit. "We were giving them the opportunity to take hotel rooms, rent cars, evacuate to wherever they needed."

Salit says Dynasty's employees formulate their own personal emergency plans during the year. When faced with storms like Helene and Milton, however, the firm tracks where its employees have relocated. Dynasty also uses an emergency notification system to communicate with employees before, during and after the storms.

Casey Sabnis, senior vice president of operational risk at LPL Financial, said many advisors may have found themselves unable to maintain critical operations due to power outages, evacuation orders, or infrastructure damage in the wake of Helene and Milton. According to Sabnis, the past few days have been an uncomfortable but necessary reminder of the importance of comprehensive emergency and business continuity planning for advisors.

"Having a plan on paper is just the first step – you've got to put it into action and ensure it's effective," said Sabnis. "For instance, having a list of client cell phone numbers is a great start, but it's not much help if it's stuck on a computer in a powerless office. Instead, ensure that hard copies are available in multiple locations and that key executives have the means to communicate, such as phone power banks or generators, even when the power's out."

When advising clients, Sabnis encourages them to have emergency cash on hand, as ATMs and credit cards may not work during power outages.

"As for document storage, it's more crucial than ever. Important files should be backed up and accessible remotely or stored in secure, off-site or cloud-based locations to ensure they're protected and available when needed most," said Sabnis.

Finally, **Janet Fox, LPL financial advisor and president of ACH Investment Group**, agrees that power outages can create havoc during natural disasters. That's why it is important to have back up plans and a little cash on hand in the event of interruptions.

"A withdrawal from your bank ATM in advance might be beneficial. It does not have to be huge amounts of cash, but enough to get by for a couple of days or so for supplies. This would include pet food and supplies for any of your pets," said Fox.

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