



PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

Private Sector Preparedness

Japan's Tragedy Renews Focus on Disaster Readiness

BY ELLEN CLAS

The 9.0-magnitude Tohoku earthquake and tsunami on March 11 killed tens of thousands, left hundreds of thousands homeless, and incapacitated businesses integral to local and national economies. The catastrophe also triggered a crisis at the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear complex that had not been resolved as this issue went to press.

This event illustrates the importance of safety, emergency preparedness, and continuity planning for individuals, businesses and

government. In America, businesses form the backbone of the economy. A commitment to planning today among businesses will help support employees, customers, the community, the local economy and even the country. It also protects your business investment and gives your company a better chance for survival.

Resiliency and Reliability

The viability of a company depends on its resiliency; even the shortest downtime can be destructive. Federal experts estimate that 40 percent of small businesses close their doors permanently after experiencing a disaster. Additionally, in a time of crisis, reliability is a keystone in response, recovery and rebuilding efforts. Private companies maintain an estimated 85 percent of all critical infrastructures (power, water, transportation, communication and food) in the U.S. and provide work for the vast majority of the country's employees. Without private industry's resiliency, the ability to get communities thriving again after major incidents is compromised.

The signature event affecting emergency planning in the U.S. was September 11, 2001. The report of the 9-11 Commission contained a number of recommendations for improving the nation's preparedness and highlighted the fact that private sector preparedness is as important as that of government and the public sector.

The recommendations of the 9/11 Commission became law in 2007. The legislation mandated the creation of the Voluntary Private Sector Preparedness Accreditation and Certification Program (PS Prep), which provides a mechanism for third-party accreditation of companies that conform to one or more preparedness standards adopted by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). These standards are:

ASIS International: Organizational Resilience: Security Preparedness, and Continuity Management Systems—Requirements with Guidance for Use, ASIS SPC. 1-2009. This standard is freely available at www.asisonline.org.

British Standards Institution: Business Continuity Management Part 1: Code of Practice for Business Continuity Management, BS 25999-1: 2006; and Business Continuity Management Part 2: Specification for Business Continuity Management, BS 25999-2: 2007. These standards can be purchased from <http://shop.bsigroup.com>.

National Fire Protection Association (NFPA): Standard 1600 on Disaster/Emergency Management and Business Continuity Programs (2007 and 2010 Editions). This standard is freely available at www.nfpa.org.

The PS-Prep program is the first comprehensive set of standards that businesses can use to measure their preparedness for all hazards. Participation is voluntary, but DHS encourages all private sector entities to consider seeking certification on one or more of the standards.

The ANSI-ASQ National Accreditation Board (ANAB) will oversee the certification process and accredit qualified third parties to carry out the certification. Certification will confirm that an accredited third party certification organization has validated a private sector entity's preparedness to one of the three standards adopted by DHS. Certified organizations will undergo periodic reassessment and auditing.

Business Continuity Management

DRII, the Institute for Continuity Management and the Business Continuity Institute (BCI) have jointly established the generally accepted guidelines of business continuity management. The guidelines consolidate the many program elements described in NFPA 1600 into ten segments. For more information, visit the websites of DRII (www.drii.org) and BCI (<http://thebci.org/>).

Going through emergency preparedness and business continuity planning process is an extensive undertaking for most businesses, but, if done correctly, it is a sound investment for the future. Communication is key to the success of emergency preparedness and business continuity planning. Therefore, it is advisable to establish an advisory group made up of key stakeholders throughout the organization to formulate the program and direct its implementation and testing.

Ellen Clas, CBCP, CEM, CIH, CSP, is director of Clas Consulting LLC in Norfolk, Mass. She can be reached at (508) 613-2171 and ellen@clasconsulting.com.

