



## Virginia Workplace Law

### Earth(quake), Wind and Fire. Will You Be Ready If Disaster Strikes?

**By: Annemarie Cleary. Tuesday, August 30th, 2011**

What a week we just had in Virginia! An earthquake, a hurricane with flooding, and swamp fire smoke all in one week. If last week didn't convince you to review, or prepare for the first time, a Business Continuity Plan (BCP), then the approaching ten-year anniversary of 9/11 should spur you to action.

The [9/11 attacks destroyed](#) tens of thousands of vital records, irreplaceable documents and art. The businesses affected lost employee records, customer lists and many, many more documents vital to business operations. As many employers on the East Coast are undoubtedly discovering, it doesn't take a disaster as devastating as 9/11 to cause an interruption in business. Earthquakes, hurricanes, floods and fires are just a small sample of the very real disasters that can strike your business. Are you prepared to pick up the pieces?

Creating a BCP so that you can get your business up and running as soon as possible after a disaster is vital to your company's long-term survival. A BCP should include lists of emergency contact information, both internal and external, and a detailed recovery plan and should be developed with employees from all business units and levels of your company.

Begin by assessing the potential risks to your business' ability to deliver products or services to customers. Arizona business may need to plan for the effects of an evacuation due to forest fires, but not for a hurricane. Businesses in Richmond, Virginia, on the other hand, would be more likely to plan for flooding as a result of a hurricane, for an office fire or even for an earthquake.

After determining the risks that your business might face, consider how to mitigate the effects of those risks on business operations. The objective is to compile a detailed step-by-step guide to getting your business running again. You should:

- Identify the employees who are critical to the operations of your business, as well as a backup for each position in case key personnel are not available. Your list should include every

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available means of contacting these individuals (e.g., business phone, home phone, cell phone, business and home email).

- Identify the critical products and services you provide to your customers and record the contact information for your most important customers so that you can stay in touch.
- Identify an alternative location from which to operate your business in the event your office is inaccessible.
- Identify contingency equipment options. If, for example, the equipment your company uses to operate is its computers, contingency equipment options might include identifying which of your employees can telecommute.
- Identify what protections you need to take to preserve confidential client information.
- It is vital that your BCP includes a technology recovery plan. You should regularly back up important IT data, such as customer lists, banking information, employee records and anything else that would be necessary to starting your business again. Back up the information and arrange a secure off-site storage location. Redundancy is the key.

Once you have all the necessary information, put your plan in writing. Create step-by-step instructions on what to do, who should do it, when it should be done and how. Ensure that critical personnel have copies of the plan and keep a copy off-site, too. Then, practice and maintain your plan. Review your plan periodically and walk through the plan with an imaginary disaster in mind. Then, make changes where needed.

There are a number of websites that offer additional suggestions on [developing a BCP](#), including the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and [Inc.](#) . You can also [contact your Virginia employment attorney](#) for assistance in preparing a plan.

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