

Planning For Reconstituting A Law Office After A Disaster

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A. Reestablish Communications within the Organization

- Determine who is most important for emergency response. This will likely be your executive and administrative staff. These should be contacted first. Select someone to coordinate communications. Select a backup someone to coordinate communication.
- Have redundant communications capabilities. Don't have all your cell phones with one carrier. Use Blackberrys. Establish an emergency web page.
- Reestablish communications from the top down. Don't encourage all staff to call their superiors. An exception to this may be necessary for outlying offices. It may be easier for them to call in.

B. Have a Place for the Emergency Response Team to Go.

- Once you have a backup office, your team members are no longer dependent on electronic means to communicate with each other.
- Possible places: client's offices; law firm offices; outlying offices; temporary rentals; employee's spouses offices. Don't be too proud.
- The temporary office ideally has land line phones, computers, internet connectivity. Consider purchasing laptops.

C. Reestablish Communications with the Outside World

- Inform your clients, adversaries and the courts of your situation. Not all judges or adversaries will be sympathetic. You probably know who they are.
- If you have lost access to your case files, start reassembling them using you file backup tapes and with help from your clients, adversaries and courts.
- Assign liaisons to each of your clients.
- Have a communications director through whom all communications with the public and press is vetted.

D. Find Places for your Staff to Go

- The same as B, only more of it. Try the same tactics to find space. If your information technology people have reestablished a network, one of your primary space concerns will be network connectivity at the site. If you have Citrix or other similar tools, let staff work from home.
- If your office is damaged but not destroyed, begin your assessment of when and if you are going to move back as soon as possible. This will give your planning focus. If your office is destroyed, begin looking for new space right away.
- Take care of your staff. They will be traumatized. They need the administrative services of payroll, benefits, employee emotional support programs.
- Communicate with your staff often and tell them the truth. If there are unpleasant things to report, let them hear it from you, not the media.

E. Other Important Stuff

- Insurance Audit – Financial Planning
- File backup plan and offsite storage
- Full evacuation drills
- Beware of heroic efforts, especially in IT, but also in facilities
- Do not be overly optimistic in your communications with staff, the courts, your clients or your adversaries
- Hire any consultants you need as soon as you can. You will probably need a few, such as environmental and IT consultants.