

Business Continuity News

The Wizard of Oz: “I bestow upon you the title of Disaster!”

(From Issue 1: we have a disaster management team, they need to show up in an emergency, you were given phone numbers and a flow chart)

Why declare a disaster

The most important step in disaster response is formally declaring a “disaster”. It is also the hardest thing to do. I call this the Wizard of Oz step. Like giving the lion a badge of courage, once done, there are no limits to what the response teams can do. Without a declaration, there is nothing but wasted effort.

So, why is it so hard to declare a disaster? Psychobabble aside, its probably a statistical thingy. The more times something could have happened but didn't, the more immune we become. There is also the “chicken little effect”. To counter both of these I offer the John Nicoletti corollary, “you'll never know when you over react, only when you under react!”

Declaring a formal disaster gets you all the help you need. People respond quicker and better. Damage is limited and recovery times improved. Lines of communication are established. Without the rallying cry of “disaster”, you end up fighting the battle alone or worse, making decisions in a vacuum. I know, I've done it; and I've failed (see recent history of disasters below)!

How to declare a disaster

A disaster is formally declared by any President's Council member or lacking one of them, Rambo. Just say, “I declare a disaster” and it is done. Oh yea, you should tell someone. You could tell me (my phone numbers are on the Securiry card I just sent out, and I know how to spell Securiry, just seeing if you are paying attention). Or, if you are too lazy to pull out the card or forgot which bar you left it in, simply call Security at x-1139. Once notified, Securiry will start calling the rest of the team.

How to decide if it is a Disaster

Good luck! This is difficult, especially during the early stages of an event. It helps to have a crystal ball. Absent a good crystal ball here are some considerations. It is usually a disaster if:

- Employees could be at risk of harm or injury,
- People will be sent home early from work,
- People will be asked to stay home or report late to work (delayed opening),
- Power outages are expected to exceed 90 minutes (that's when we start loosing life safety systems in buildings),
- Buildings or property suffers extensive damage (cannot be occupied),
- You expect and dread calls from the press or media i.e. adverse PR,
- You expect significant interaction with law enforcement agencies,
- There are nationwide or locally declared emergencies,
- Significant business systems are disrupted or inoperative i.e. F&A business computers, SCD super computers, significant virus attacks, the yogurt machine won't work,
- Tragic accident or event,

Business Continuity News

- There is a good chance you will appear on the 6 or 10 pm news and have to “explain” away an adverse situation or event.

Determining Who Is Really Needed in a Disaster

Often, only part of the team is required to combat a disaster. At the beginning of an event, it is not always clear who is and who isn't involved. We have chosen to assemble the whole team. Once assembled, key members will be identified and the others will be sent to the bullpen or home. You can always disband the team within seconds, if the disaster doesn't materialize. Conversely, it can take hours to assemble a team. When you declare a disaster, the whole team will show up...and that is a good thing.

Deciding where the team will meet

Rambo has a list of possible meeting locations along with available amenities i.e. phones, computers, faxes, wine selection, cheeses etc. Specific circumstances will dictate where the team meets. Because most disasters involve business systems, we try and locate the management team in or near CG-4 but there are no hard and fast rules.

Recent Examples of Disasters

Disasters have occurred (more or less) four times within the past few years. In each instance we implemented some part of our business continuity plans. It may not have always looked or seemed like a disaster but we really did go into disaster response mode. Three times Rick was conveniently gone but the teams forged ahead, relatively successfully, I might add. This proves that as an organization we know how to do the right things in emergencies.

9/11

Immediately following 9/11 a portion of the management team convened and began to manage UCAR's response. Katy, Rambo and Jack Fellows convened in Katy's office and via conference call. Various decisions were made and communicated including emergency security provisions, communications to staff, staff work schedule etc. This was relatively simple response because it did not involve any business systems, per se. However, it was emotionally draining given the subject matter. Our biggest problem involved finding and communicating with employees on travel. Following 9/11 we established division/program teams to deal with travel issues. A disaster was never formally declared but I think everyone would agree we were definitely in disaster mode. I would give us a solid B grade.

Blaster Worm Virus

The blaster worm virus attacked on a Friday morning. Virtually the entire President's Council was unavailable. I was marooned in Ft. Collins with a car being repaired. Jeff Reaves was acting president and assembled a portion of the corporate management team. Jeff and the team members did an outstanding job of analyzing the problem, crafting and implementing a response plan and communicating with staff. Some response activities might have improved if all

Business Continuity News

team members had been involved but overall, the attack was thwarted in a very timely manner. Little serious damage occurred and the team worked wonders without the usual “leaders”. A disaster was declared by formation of most of the management team but it should have involved all the management team. I would give us a B+ grade.

Mesa Lab Power Outage

When the power outage first occurred we did most of the things right. I assembled all available members of the President’s Council, Tim and Katy. We agreed to declare a disaster. The building was evacuated. We notified staff via email and voicemail. SCD was consulted and they began an orderly shutdown of the computer center.

All was right with the world. Then I lost control of events. First, I allowed Tim and Katy to evacuate with the rest of the employees. I should have had them stay to help manage events. Next I tried to assemble critical members of the management team but almost all were off-site. I gave up too easy and went into Rambo mode and tried to manage the incident by myself. Several critical lines of communication were not established. Then I allowed all SCD and maintenance staff to evacuate. I failed to assemble the whole corporate management team.

Subsequently, we were not ready for internal problems that occurred when power was restored. We had to go to a delayed opening while critical life safety systems were brought back on-line the following morning. While we avoided serious damage to critical equipment and there were no injuries, the delay in resuming operations was unacceptable. This is a great example of why it is so critically important to not only declare a disaster but to also convene the whole corporate management team. The best to be said is nobody died. I give us (me) a C- for this response.

Computer Hackers

The attack of computers occurred over an extended time period. The seriousness of the situation was not initially apparent. As the extent of the attacks became known many groups began to engage. I was away on business travel. The president’s council designated Al Kellie to respond to the attacks. Corporate wide communications were sent out. Al and SCD performed effectively to limit further attacks. While the words “disaster declared” were not formally spoken, all involved knew and understood the gravity of the situation. I give us an A for this response.

Summary

If it is bad...and we want to minimize the damage, the first and most critically important step is to formally declare a disaster. Little else of value happens until this occurs. Without this “Wizard of Oz” declaration nothing gets done. Least you be afraid to declare a disaster remember, “You’ll never know when you’ve over reacted, only when you under react.”