




Your Five-Step Restaurant Disaster Plan



Hurricanes have battered the Atlantic and Gulf coasts bringing commerce to a standstill. Earthquakes have disrupted life in California, where wildfires have proven fatal and destroyed much of the wine country. Disasters happen, and the more you prepare today, the less you'll have to worry about tomorrow. No matter how uncomfortable it may be to have these conversations with your team, it will be a lot harder when you're staring at an evacuation order or standing in the aftermath.

Follow these five steps to minimize your recovery time.

1. Plan for the worst

- To start the process, block off a few hours on the calendar, sit down with your management team and flesh out a plan. Then, share it with your staff so you have informed workers, ready to tackle the task of emergency preparation.
 - Look at local hazards and identify historic patterns. Also, check out the FEMA website which breaks the country down by region and cites known risks for each area.
 - Form an evacuation plan for yourself early on, a tactic that makes securing shop a lot less stressful. Also, ensure that everyone on your staff have a place to go.
 - Update emergency contacts for your staff and emphasize the importance of keeping open communication throughout the emergency.
 - Look for your local Disaster Relief Center during the planning stage, while you still have electricity and access to the internet.

2. Be an emergency taskmaster

- Assign specific roles and outline duties clearly at your next staff meeting. Update these roles regularly, and cross-train in case individual team members can't make it in.
- Take the time to survey your utility lines and make sure shutoff valves are clearly labeled. This can save a great deal of stress in an emergency, and may also minimize potential damage.
- Have a waterproof hard copy of your outside emergency contacts: local police and fire stations, insurance agents, POS account managers, utility providers and any applicable property managers. Open lines of communication will give you peace of mind during the event and hasten the recovery process after.

3. Know What Your Insurance Covers

- When it comes to disasters, the ins and outs of insurance coverage could fill a whole separate post but here are some things to consider:
 - If you lease your space, what's covered by your landlord?
 - Do you have enough coverage to rebuild from the ground up?
 - Is your deductible manageable?
 - What disasters are covered by your policy?
- If you run a food truck in addition to your brick and mortar business, make sure your auto insurance covers flood and fire damage.

- Also, don't ignore flood insurance for your restaurant. A broken pipe will flood your kitchen just as quickly as a hurricane storm surge, so it's a good idea to spring for the extra coverage if available and within budget.
- No matter what you decide in terms of coverage, make sure you lock in a plan early, since many insurance policies require mandatory waiting periods. This is particularly true of wind and flood damage policies, which may not cover damages caused within 30 days of initiating a new policy.

4. Secure the Premises

- Assess your restaurant's layout:
 - If you're expecting storm surge, sandbags will afford you some protection for water under 2 feet deep, but have a plan to keep your furniture as high as possible.
 - For high winds, secure three-quarter-inch plywood with wood screws over windows and doors. Also, make sure your doors have working head and foot bolts.
 - Patios, balconies and decks should be assessed for weakness and all exterior furnishings should be secured inside, not just lashed down.
- Propane containers should be returned or caged outside, out of the wind. It's not safe to store propane containers indoors during an emergency.
- If you have any lead time, clean out your fridge of items nearing expiration. This will minimize your workload after an event and if the disaster misses you, you'll still have a clean fridge.
- Investing in a decent wet/dry vacuum or pump system may be essential if flooding is a seasonal reality of life in your region.

5. Be Prepared for the Aftermath

- When you can access your kitchen once more, don't put off emptying the walk-in for longer than necessary. After Hurricane Katrina, the delay in relief transformed many restaurant walk-ins into massive fungal farms as heat, moisture and darkness accelerated spoilage. Remember that flood water often contains sewage and industrial runoff, which may contaminate food further. Many of the dry goods will need to be tossed as well, so be meticulous and assess food safety for each item.
- Some inventory loss may be covered by insurance but it's best to be clear ahead of time what is covered and what expenses you can reasonably recoup.
- If you plan to invest in an industrial generator remember that you'll need fuel, and the larger the generator, the more fuel you'll need. When you run out, you run out. Also, due to carbon monoxide poisoning, never run your generator indoors.
- Combat food waste immediately following a disaster by cooking what you can for relief workers. It'll make sure your stock isn't going to waste, the service may be tax deductible as a charitable donation, and you can engage with your community and create greater visibility.

While you're in recovery mode, harness social media to communicate with customers and your fellow restaurateurs. Network with your community to see if you can provide any assistance to relief efforts. and when you are ready, make a big deal about your grand re-opening!



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