

Forming Disaster Recovery and Emergency Response Teams



By [Leo Wrobel](#)

Date: Jul 27, 2007

[Return to the article](#)

You can have the most comprehensive recovery plan in the world, but it will do you little good if you can't mobilize and organize your "first responders." Leo Wrobel shows you how to implement what the military calls 4Ci and to respond to disasters quickly by creating specialized disaster recovery teams

If you have been exposed at all to disaster recovery planning, you have probably been introduced to the concept of recovery planning *teams*.

This article is designed to help you *define* or *refine* the recovery team concept for your organization. If you already have recovery teams in place, use this article as a convenient checklist. If not, use it to set some up.

Most sizable organizations have some type of business resumption plan in place that is designed to respond to a disaster in an equipment room or other facility. A disaster, for purposes of this article, is loosely defined as an incident that damages a facility, some equipment, or data supporting a "mission-critical" business function.

For such an incident, the response plan should provide for specific recovery teams to allow assigned personnel to effect a timely recovery. *Recovery teams* should therefore include the following

- Specific "first responders" to disasters
- Teams specifically empowered to activate and supervise a recovery plan
- Teams to support the affected facility, any alternate work locations, and if necessary, recovery centers

Who You Gonna Call?

To call any recovery team, you must first establish what the military calls **4Ci**, which stands for **C**ommand, **C**ontrol, **C**ommunications, **C**omputers, and **I**ntelligence.

The first four are pretty self-explanatory in the context of disaster recovery planning. *Intelligence* does not mean that people in your organization instantly become smarter. In this context, intelligence means the ability to feed an instant situational analysis of what happened and how bad it was, upstream to executive management.

In wartime, the military pretty much responds to one crisis after another, so they are very good at 4Ci. Today, more and more commercial organizations are demanding this level of precision. That's why business resumption plans are typically initiated through some kind of *first alert process*.

Like the military, the purpose of a first alert process is to ensure that management is informed of a disaster at a facility immediately after it is discovered. Documented procedures and checkpoints are written into the plan, including an initial assessment of the damages, which quickly provides responsible management with the information necessary to answer this all-important question: Do we declare a disaster or not?

This is not always an easy decision because disasters come in all shapes and sizes including the following

- Natural disasters
- Floods
- Earthquakes
- Hurricanes
- Tornadoes
- Temperature extremes

- Fire
- Water damage: roof leakage, sprinkler systems, drains, and so on
- Contamination of the building
- PCBs (such as from a fire in a transformer)
- Asbestos
- Other causes
- Intentional causes
- Bomb threat
- Rioting, martial law
- Terrorism
- Vandalism
- Telephone cable cut
- Internet failure, virus, or intrusion

Because disasters come in all shapes and sizes, the people who first discover and report them also come in all shapes and sizes. Often the message does not get through to the right people without a delay.

For example, people in the Information Technology department make the assumption that they will get the word of a problem first. Not true. In practice, a night security guard will probably be the first to discover that the power is off or that a water pipe is broken. That's why it is important to have first alert processes that transcend the various departments and always ensure that the right people get the word immediately *no matter who discovers the problem*.

Once procedures to do this are in place, you can begin thinking about response team.

The Executive Management Team

Once an accurate situation report has been submitted to management, they can decide what to do and how to mobilize the many resources needed to recover. Some companies call this function a Recovery Management Team (RMT) or an Executive Management Team (EMT). For purposes of this article let's call it the EMT.

The principal executive over the EMT is the Recovery Chairperson (who in the past has been known by other names such as Recovery Chief or Recovery Chairman—names that originated in the male-dominated military of 30 or 40 years ago). Political correctness aside, you can call these functions whatever you want, but make sure you have them.

Recovery Chairperson and EMT Responsibilities

Upon notification, the EMT, which has been *briefed in advance and trained*, should report immediately to the recovery headquarters location identified in the plan. The Recovery Chairperson is the principal executive involved in management of the EMT.

The job of the Recovery Chairperson is to serve as a liaison to executive management, request executive representative if necessary, and authorize the activation of one or more subordinate recovery plans.

The Recovery Chairperson also provides high-level management reports of the recovery process as well as "filtering and forwarding" reports from subordinate teams to avoid overwhelming executive management with thousands of details.

These subordinate teams can include, but are not necessarily limited to, teams such as the *Affected Site team*, *Central Support team*, *Magnetic Media Retrieval team*, *New Equipment Installation team*, *Existing Equipment Recovery team*, *Systems Software team*, and so on.

It does not end with the MIS and Technical Services department, however. The EMT and Recovery Chairperson are also expected to establish and maintain liaison with other departments or teams, including (but not limited to) the *Legal and Regulatory team*, *Building and Facilities team*, *Finance and Purchasing team*, *Insurance and Risk Management team*, *Physical Security team*, *Travel and Transportation Team*, and others.

What Sort of Teams Will Your Organization Need?

That's a great question, and the answer will depend on a variety of factors. That will be the size of your organization. Size is directly proportional to complexity of recovery and the greater the complexity the more people and teams that will be required.

There are other things to consider, as well. Generally speaking, the larger the organization, the more difficult it is to buy something. That might mean that you need a Finance team whose function is to have standing purchase orders "in the pipe" and as part of the recovery plan. These purchase orders would, under disaster situation, be used to circumvent the normal purchasing procedure to get the equipment you need to recover NOW.

Similarly, a larger organization might need to surround the affected facility with dozen "rent-a-cops" to avoid looting and protect the damaged facility. So you might need a Security team

You get the idea. Consider the size and dynamics of your organization and then use Checklist like the one in the following table to help you determine where staff support is required and whether you should have a team

As you go through this thought process, however, remember that you might be operating in two, three, or even four different locations after a disaster. Some teams will be required at the damaged facility. Others will be required in setting up a new place across town to conduct business until the original facility is restored. A third set of teams might have to travel thousands of miles to a disaster recovery center. And, don't forget that a small contingent will have to support the EMT as well.

All this means that more teams than you first thought might be necessary, each with unique responsibilities and needs in a disaster. The following table assumes two locations: the Recovery Headquarter and the Affected Site. This should suffice for a small- to medium-sized company

You could easily see however how the table might mushroom into three or four columns for larger organizations. If this is you, consider adding two more columns: Recovery Center and New Permanent Business Location.

Support Function	Recovery Headquarters	Affected Site
EMPLOYEE RELATIONS	X	
FACILITIES	X	X
FINANCE	X	
RISK MANAGEMENT	X	
INTERNAL AUDIT	X	
LABOR RELATIONS	X	

LEGAL	X	
TELECOMMUNICATIONS	X	X
OFFICE SERVICES		
MAIL SERVICES	X	
SECURITY	X	X
SHIPPING & RECEIVING	X	X
MEDICAL	X	X
PUBLIC AFFAIRS	X	X
PURCHASING	X	
TRANSPORTATION	X	

Reprinted with permission from Leo Wrobel's upcoming new book *Business Resumption Planning Second Edition*, coming soon (summer 2007). (Preorder now at Amazon.com or your favorite bookstore.) [c]2007 Taylor Publishing, New York, NY. All Rights Reserved

Summary

I hope this information was useful to you. Next month we will get into some specific duties and responsibilities of the teams in Part II of this article. In the meantime and as always remember that each incremental improvement you make to your business resumption plan protects your organization and your career.

Best of luck in your pursuits
