Emergency planning

What will you and your staff do if a disaster strikes? Putting time into planning for emergencies makes good business sense — it helps keep you and your workers safe and minimises downtime.

Get prepared

An emergency plan is a health and safety requirement. Not having one is a big risk for your business and the people in it.

Being prepared for an emergency or disaster can:

- save lives and prevent harm
- help businesses to continue trading through hardship
- give staff and owners confidence
- protect equipment and premises
- quickly get businesses running again.

Natural disaster + being prepared = better for business (/news/natural-disaster-being-prepared-better-for-business/)

Keeping your business healthy and safe (/risks-and-operations/health-and-safety/plans-tools-and-learning-from-incidents/)

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Identify emergency risks

No one expects you to be able to plan for every kind of emergency. You should have a good idea of risks you face at work, given your specific industry and location. It's about being prepared for scenarios most relevant to your situation.

It is especially important to plan for sudden events that may occur with little to no warning or time to prepare.

Here are some emergencies you might need a plan for — some may be more of a threat to you than others.

- **Natural hazards**: Earthquake, flood, tsunami, volcanic eruption or ash, landslide, tornado or high winds, extreme weather (e.g., drought, major storm), fire.
- **Health emergencies**: Workplace incidents, hazardous substance event (e.g., chemical spill), medical emergency, public health event (e.g., pandemics), violent people, animal attacks, epidemics.
- **Utility failures**: Electricity outages, IT outages, water supply issues.

If you have staff, talk to them about the risks they think are most relevant to your business.

Read our guide on how to assess risk for more information. What you learn from this assessment can form the basis of your emergency plan.

Resilient Organisations has information on how small businesses can prepare for an emergency.

Shut happens: Resilience for small business [PDF, 432KB] (external link) — Resilient Organisations

Striving through [PDF, 2.1MB] (external link) — Resilient Organisations
Civil Defence has information about preparing for, and recovering from a disaster.

Hazards (external link) (https://getready.govt.nz/emergency/) — Civil Defence


Case study

Team plan

A small factory runs a staff workshop to assess the most likely risks of an emergency in their workplace.

The factory uses heavy machinery and chemicals, so the team decides to include strategies for dealing with electrical fires and chemical spills in its emergency plan.

The team puts together an emergency plan, which includes:

- how emergency procedures will be tested, including debriefing after each test to improve things that didn’t go according to plan
- frequency of these tests
- contact details of people to alert in an emergency
- what each person’s role is during an emergency
- details of which chemicals are used and how they are stored
- step-by-step instructions on what to do for spills of every type of chemical they use.

Each person is responsible in different ways. Lydia will make sure everyone is accounted for if the workshop is evacuated. Mike will contact emergency services. Francis is responsible for keeping emergency gear stocked and accessible.

The manager Lucas makes sure the emergency plan can be seen by all employees and site visitors, and he adds it to new employee induction packs. Lucas also realises he needs be at the helm if there’s an emergency. As the leader of the business, he must be prepared to be direct and give clear instructions.


Hazardous substances requirement (/compliance-matters/workplace-health-and-safety/risks/hazardous-substances/) — Compliance Matters

Talk to employees with disabilities

Find out what assistance, if any, they require if there’s an emergency. Consider how to assist any visitors who have a disability.

What your plan should cover

Scale your plan to your business. This means if you’re a two-person operation, you may decide to meet at the school close to work if there’s an emergency. If your business is bigger or more complex, you’ll probably need more structured systems in place.

As you make plans, remember emergencies often require you to be flexible. Think about strategies rather than rigid plans. Save electronic and paper copies of your plan.

Emergency procedures

These should include:

Staff evacuation: Be clear about the procedure to follow in an emergency. If staff work offsite, plan how to stay in contact.
Make sure staff know what to do in case of:

- **Fire**: If you own your premises, you must set up and maintain a fire evacuation plan. If you are a tenant, follow your landlord's evacuation plan. You may need an approved evacuation scheme. Check New Zealand Fire Service's website for criteria.

  [Do I need an approved evacuation scheme?](https://onlineservices.fire.org.nz/Home/EvacuationSchemes#DoIneedanevacuationscheme) — New Zealand Fire Service

  Fire and Emergency New Zealand has a tool to help you create an escape plan in the event of a fire.

  [Creating an escape plan](https://fireandemergency.nz/at-home/creating-an-escape-plan/) — Fire and Emergency New Zealand

- **Earthquake**: Unlike fire threats, it’s dangerous to evacuate staff outside during and immediately after a quake. Everyone should drop, cover and hold during the quake. Make a plan on where to meet after the shaking stops.

- **Tsunami**: Find out if your workplace is in a tsunami zone. If an earthquake lasts longer than a minute, or knocks you off your feet, plan to get to higher ground or as far inland as possible. Remember, a tsunami may arrive before an official warning is given. Your local civil defence and emergency management group will have more information on tsunami procedures.

  [Local civil defence groups](http://www.civildefence.govt.nz/find-your-civil-defence-group/) — Civil Defence

  Assembly point: Decide on a safe meeting place that’s close to your premises. In a major crisis, staff will want to be with their families. Make a plan for staff to leave — after telling you they are going. Civil Defence has templates to help you and your staff plan to get home after an event.

  [Personal workplace emergency plan and other downloads](https://getready.govt.nz/prepared/resources/?Topic=2) — Civil Defence

- **Wardens**: Make staff wardens responsible for counting all workers and visitors, eg sub-contractors and clients, after an evacuation. Have alternates in case of absence.

- **First aid**: Have a procedure to handle injuries. You’ll need a medical kit for minor injuries. Identify the nearest medical centre or hospital for anything more serious. Find out if any staff members have first aid training.

- **Emergency contacts**: Keep important contact details updated and handy. This includes phone numbers for staff, emergency services, clients, suppliers and insurance company. Also follow your local civil defence and emergency management group website and Facebook page to get information and assistance in an emergency.

  [Find your local civil defence group](http://www.civildefence.govt.nz/find-your-civil-defence-group/) — Civil Defence

- **Communication**: Make sure you have a plan for contacting staff to let them know when and where to report to work. Plan for an alternative premises or work arrangements if your workplace is unsafe.

- **Utilities**: You may need to switch off electricity, water and gas supplies if you suspect there’s a leak. Fires caused by gas leaks and electrical sparks are a risk after a natural disaster strikes. You will also want to save water. Make sure you or a designated staff member know when and how to shut these off.

**Looking after people**

Your plan should include how you will contact staff to make sure they are OK, see what help they need and keep them informed.

People respond to and recover from emergencies in different ways. Rather than assuming how badly affected a person may be, make a point of regularly asking about their wellbeing following a crisis.
As an employer, consider what you can do to support staff and their families. If your premises close for some time, how can you bring your team back together?

Resilient Organisations has advice on how to look after your people in an extended crisis.

[Staffed or Stuffed (external link) (http://www.resorgs.org.nz/staffed-or-stuffed)] — Resilient Organisations

If you provide products or services that are important during emergencies, plan how you will cope with a surge in demand. Also think about whether your business can offer support to the community or other businesses in times of need.

Do keep a grab bag of essentials.

Store emergency contact details, a first aid kit and any essential items together. Appoint someone to grab it if there’s an emergency. Staff should also keep their own grab bag near their work stations.

Emergency supplies

Consider installing a civil defence cabinet stocked with emergency supplies, eg water, blankets, rope, torches, radio, first aid kit, dust masks and gloves.

If you provide food for staff, you’ll still need to provide it in an emergency. Stock enough supplies for 24 hours.

It’s also a good idea to keep petrol tanks at least half-full in all work vehicles. ATMs may not be working if the electricity is out, so it’s a good idea to have emergency cash on hand.


[How to be prepared at work (external link) (https://getready.govt.nz/prepared/work/)] — Civil Defence

A business continuity plan (BCP) is your post-emergency blueprint.

It covers how to keep your business running after an emergency.

[Continuity and contingency planning (/risks-and-operations/planning-for-the-unexpected-bcp/continuity-and-contingency-planning/)]

To make plans that work, get staff input and hold regular drills.

Practice your plan

Plans must be living documents that get updated as your business grows or changes. Communication is key — and so is updating your plan when needed.

Schedule dry runs regularly — at least twice a year — but also throw in surprise drills. Discuss how these went and how you can improve. Use different scenarios to cover fires, earthquakes and other hazards.

Involve staff

Get all workers to take part in talks about emergencies. Make sure everyone’s clear about what they should do.

Think about setting up a team to plan for emergencies, preferably drawn from across your business. The team can lead all-staff talks and keep the plan updated.

Don’t plan for emergencies alone.

Getting other people involved will lead to a more robust plan that is easier to keep updated and carry out.

[Resources (external link) (https://www.resorgs.org.nz/resources/)] — Resilient Organisations
Related content

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You might be exempt from electing a H&S representative if your business is small and in a low-risk industry.

Find out more

**Health and safety basics**


Discover useful actions that will help you control risks, protect people and meet your legal responsibilities.

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**How to approach workers about H&S**


An essential part of creating a good H&S culture at your work involves having regular H&S conversations.

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