



## Digital Power

BY PETER M. CURTIS

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# What Emergencies Teach Us

*Fool me once, shame on me...  
Fool me twice, shame on me.*

**W**hat do emergencies teach mission critical and emergency management professionals? Well, for one, they teach us to prioritize our capital dollars. They help us identify our infrastructure weaknesses and focus our attention on the internal corporate political roadblocks that value engineer out improvements from a project or budget. They also allow us to refocus, force us to continually re-craft our message to align with the changing environment, and create internal ingenuity. Opportunities evolve as well. Immediately after an event, mission critical and emergency management professionals should sit down with all stakeholders and get buy-in and budget approval on the next steps to business resiliency. Perhaps the most important is the post-mortem discussion. Emergencies can be treated as a pop quiz to a certain extent: an unplanned wake-up call that allows us to practice and implement better business resiliency

strategies and plans. The bottom line: emergencies provide real-world experience and a benchmark for defining areas of improvement. We can respond with situational awareness, enabling us to protect our people, national security, profitability, and way of life.

**For example, on Saturday, March 15th, downtown Atlanta experienced a tornado, and on February 26th a massive power outage occurred in Florida.**

After an emergency, a company has a chance to reevaluate its business strategy/policies and consider including new critical equipment, begin management programs, and implement best practices where none existed before, thereby mitigating risk. These items can then be included into a new line item in the capital and operating budgets. Soon after a critical event memories are fresh; however, everyday events suppress urgency as time passes and the chance for real sustained progress is lost.

Emergencies can be classified in the following categories: natural disasters, catastrophic events, and infrastructure equipment failures (see the table). For example, on Saturday,

Natural Disasters	Equipment Failures	Catastrophic Events
Earthquake	Telecommunications Failure	Medical Emergency
Tornado	Water Leakage	Fire
Hurricane/Typhoon	Power Outage	Accidental Explosion
Snow/Ice Storm	HVAC Failure	Bomb Threat
Seasonal/Local Flooding	Generator Failure	Theft: Data/Physical Assets

Failure Table

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Therefore, take the following exercise to examine your emergency preparedness. Ask yourself the following questions and provide realistic answers. If you can answer the questions, you will be better prepared the next time an emergency or critical event takes place. If not, take some steps now. If your budget is tight look for improvements that are

high impact/low cost. You can always find something: The result of your effort improves confidence, continuity, and resiliency.

**Loss of Critical Personnel:** Employee retirement, sick leave, or internal promotion

- What knowledge was lost?
- Where is the critical documentation?
- How do we find and train new personnel?
- What risks are faced during the transition? (remember that greater than 50% of downtime is attributed to human error)

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### Situational Awareness During Critical Events

**Events:** Fires, blackouts, natural disasters, terrorism, building equipment failures

- Who should be contacted?
- Can you identify your critical systems supporting production and infrastructure?
- Where are the procedures? When was the last time they were updated?
- Will you be able to respond in time?

**Daily Operations:** Inconsistent data or information, inaccessible documentation, hindered information sharing, unstructured work flow

- How is information shared and leveraged throughout your organization?
- Is system data readily accessible?
- Are the EOPs, SOPs, and ARPs up to date?
- How are all revisions approved and made available to all users?

JFK said, "The time to repair your roof is when the sun is shining." So consider revisiting that strategic plan that you drafted after the last emergency, re-prioritize it and pledge to make one low-cost improvement a month so we can better protect our people, national security, profitability, and way of life. ■