ARE YOU READY FOR THE NEXT “FLORENCE”?

I’m sorry I didn’t write this Tip of the Month a few months before Hurricane Florence came ashore in North Carolina but thought I would go ahead hope this the information would be helpful in preparing for the next Florence to come along. I am not just talking about preparing for hurricanes but for any major event which causes some element of outage or damage which alters your day-to-day business performance.

To be better prepared for the upcoming major event it is essential to have a process and a detailed plan for all types of unexpected business outage events. The best method to begin the process is to list all of the events in recent history. If you are new to the business or the area then, seek the assistance of your older team members to prepare the list. Here in the South, your list would look something like;

- snow storms
- freeze events
- floods from many different sources
- tornados
- straight line wind events and,
- power outages which can be caused by all of the above.

Next take each one of the events and begin to ask yourself all of these questions about:

1. What could possibly happen when the next event occurs?
2. And, once it occurs, what can we do to prevent any damage or consequences of the event?
3. And if it does happen, what actions can you and your teams take to remediate them?

As you develop your list of events and the possible consequences to your business, I would recommend prioritizing all of them so you have a logical method to tackle and develop the prevention process. Always place the life safety items above anything else because your building and business processes are secondary to injury or loss of life.

As you begin to work through the processes I suggest you develop a manual in a paper format in addition to having it in an electronic format. This will ensure you will always have a working copy no matter where you are. Have a tab for each type of event; and then under each tab have all of the emergency procedures to cover the problems you will encounter.

Under each tab you will have sections about communications with employees, handling the press, notifications to the local, state, and federal government as required. The procedures and processes
should also have list of contractors needed for assistance as well as power company names and contact numbers.

What I’m trying to say is everything you need at a time like this is in the manual. When I was the director of facilities and maintenance I always had a copy of the manual in my home to ensure I could properly get the processes of resolving the event started at 2a.m. before I was able to drive to the plant. The processes I am talking about are not rocket science and actually are very simple.

A good example occurred when I was watching the recent coverage of hurricane Florence on the news. In the first example the reporter was interviewing a store owner on one of the beaches on the coast of North Carolina; behind the interviewer you could see workers covering windows with plywood. All of the sheets of plywood where numbered so the crew knew exactly where the piece was designed to be installed. This store owner obviously had done this before and was very prepared for the upcoming storm.

In the other reporting example of not being prepared, the reporter was stationed at a local hardware store where trucks with contractors were loading up with plywood just days before the storm came ashore. Which example shows someone sat down and thought about what could possibly happen with hurricane strength winds heading their way? Obviously the plywood plan is pretty simple and took very little time to put into place.

The next example is what I call the “Cowley” story which occurred while I was conducting a facility operation assessment at a chicken processing plant. ss I was touring the facility I noticed a Hazmat Emergency Response trailer parked behind the plant. It was in great shape and looking through the windows told me it was stocked well and ready for action when needed. As we sat in a conference room at the end of the day to recap my observations and thoughts I asked where the key was for the Hazmat trailer. After a long discussion and a few phone calls we found it but it took about an hour to get to that point. As most of you know it is not the big stuff that comes back to bite you it’s the little stuff like... the key to the trailer. It gets better though, I asked what truck they used to move the trailer. All I got is silence and several mangers staring down at their feet. I never got an answer; again it’s the little stuff!

So the process steps are as follows:
- Develop a list of all possible events
- Prepare a list of all possible problems or business consequences
- Have a plan to prevent the consequence (like plywood over windows)
- Have a plan to remediate the consequences after the event (how do I suck up all the water)
- Practice the remediation if required (how to use a fire extinguisher)
- Review the process yearly or more frequently as needed (are all the phone numbers accurate)
• Review the process immediately after a major event, remember facts after an event are perishable so take pictures and document everything

Good luck to all and let’s assist where possible all the people in the wake of Florence!