



FIREPROOFING YOUR VITAL RECORDS —

HOW TO HANDLE THE HEAT

It's not uncommon, business owners shake their heads as the news reports on a fire that has consumed a local business leaving nothing but a burned out building. "It could never happen to us" — they think — "we're prepared." But is anyone really prepared when fire strikes?



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Whether a fire destroys a portion of your facility or brings the whole thing to the ground, the impact is devastating. According to the U.S. Fire Administration, there were 115,500 non-residential fires in 2004 resulting in \$2.3 million in damages, including both fire damage and the resulting damage from water and extinguishing materials. After these incidents, many companies found themselves without access to their vital records and unable to resume operations. Planning for a disaster and having the steps in place to recover can help ensure business continuity.

What is business continuity?

Business continuity is an organization's ability to resume operations with minimal disruption and downtime after a disaster. The Business Continuity Institute, the professional body for Business Continuity

Management, explains disaster and recovery planning as the act of anticipating incidents affecting critical business functions and processes and ensuring that response to any incident is handled in a planned and rehearsed manner.

The National Fire Protection Association estimates 47 percent of businesses that suffer a catastrophic fire cease operations within a year. Although the immediate impact of a disaster is seen in lost revenue and the inability to deliver services, there is more involved in the demise of a company, including the negativity surrounding the disaster, customers seeking alternative suppliers or services, or a loss of funding. A business continuity plan is an important tool to help reassure customers that steps are being taken to quickly return to functional business status.

DEVELOPING A DISASTER AND RECOVERY PLAN



In an ideal world, companies would have disaster and recovery plans in place protecting them from fire and other natural disasters. Unfortunately, according to www.pollingcompany.com, less than one third of U.S. small businesses have a business continuity plan. As some companies find out, having a plan in place becomes imperative when disaster strikes. Taking the time to create a disaster and recovery plan customized to the needs of your organization, ensures business continuity and decreases the risks and effects of a fire-related disaster, is well worth the investment.

The first step to creating a disaster and recovery management plan is to identify the significance of company records. Below are three classifications to consider when categorizing your records:

- **Critical records:** These records impact overall business operations and impair your ability to return to functional business status without considerable time, expense and labor. They need to be accessible within hours of a disaster and may include record inventories, contracts, legal documents and client files.
- **Useful records:** If lost or damaged, they cause inconvenience but can be quickly replaced if stored at an alternate site or recreated if they are produced on a regular basis. Schedules, time sheets and "work-in-progress" documents are some examples.
- **Non-critical records:** These records are typically inactive, may be scheduled for destruction as part of a retention and destruction plan or have little impact on business continuity. However, non-critical records are important for historical or retention purposes.

Prepare an Inventory

Once identified and categorized, it's important to create a database of records with specifics including record content, location and storage information. When the database is

complete, ensure the appropriate personnel have copies and establish a procedure to regularly update the inventory. Store the document on and off site to ensure accessibility.

Determine method of record protection

According to the Disaster Recovery Journal, only 25 percent of records protection plans address how vital records are to be protected. With a well-managed inventory, the next step is to determine how these records will be protected. When reviewing your options, keep in mind the medium on which your data is stored.

There are several protection options available including:

- Fire-resistant file and media cabinets
- Fire-resistant safes and vaults
- Insulated vaults and file room doors

Another option to safeguard records is combined on and off-site storage. This involves protecting your on-site records with fire-resistant filing and storage systems, and relocating specific records or duplicates to a separate location. In the event of a fire, off-site records are protected. Many companies use a combination of these approaches.

Create a recovery plan

The final step is determining a records recovery process. Your plan should outline where and how vital records are stored via an updated inventory, as well as action steps to recover and repair records damaged by fire or water.

- **Assess damage** – Evaluate the damage and determine the impact on your inventory.
- **Remove damaged records** – Locate damaged records and move them to a safe area or new location to begin the restoration process.
- **Restore records** – Depending on the damage sustained, restoring records may take several steps. Since water damage is a likely culprit of damage, laying out the records to dry and then cleaning them of dust and debris is the most common approach to repair.
- **Relocation of records** – Finally, relocate records back to their original location, if possible, or to a new location where they can be safely stored until your facility has been secured for re-entry.

Developing a disaster and recovery plan is vital to business continuity. The key is to develop it now, before disaster strikes, and it's too late. ■

PROTECTING YOUR VITAL RECORDS



Selecting fire-resistant products that meet and exceed Underwriters' Laboratories (UL) requirements for fire, impact and explosion resistance, as well as those extensively tested to meet government safety and security standards, can help prevent tragedy and maintain business continuity.

Product ratings

Underwriters Laboratories (UL) rates fire resistant products according to the media the product is designed to protect, the length of time it provides that protection, and whether or not the product is protected from impact. Products may undergo multiple tests to determine each rating.

To measure varying tolerance levels of record media, UL tests include three temperature ratings and five different time durations: paper storage at 350° F, media tapes and micro forms at 150° F, and diskettes at 125° F. These time lengths are assigned to a UL rating. For example, a product may receive a UL 125 Class, 1 hour rating.

Product specifics

Consider a wide range of fire-resistant products to protect your vital records including, file cabinets, record and media safes or insulated vault and file room doors.

Fire-resistant file cabinets that are designed to store vital paper records, computer data, media and small items are UL 350, UL 150 and UL 125 rated for the protection of all types of vital records will provide safe storage. Along with individually insulated drawers, high security locks and a standard manufacturer's warranty, some companies offer filing cabinets in lateral, vertical, side and end tab models, as well as two, three and four drawer styles in a variety of colors.

Fire-proof record and media safes are well suited to protect assorted media formats and larger specialty items and should offer a minimal rating of UL 72 and UL Class 125, 1 hour fire and 30 foot impact rated, security locking systems, warranties and color choices.

Vault doors are recommended for secured areas less than 5,000 cubic feet that are protected from temperatures exceeding 350° F. File room doors are recommended for areas less than 50,000 cubic feet that store non-critical records. Vaults and doors should be one, two, four and six hour UL rated with a Class 350 rating, as well as UL 72 fire and 30 foot impact rated and offer high security locking mechanisms.

Integrating these products into your storage and filing systems will safeguard your vital records and materials from fire and ensure business continuity. ■

Temperature Tolerance	
Paper Storage	350° F
Media Tapes & Micro Forms	150° F
Diskettes	125° F

SYSTEC offers SafeTec—
a full line of fireproof filing solutions.



SYSTEC SOLUTIONS: FIREPROOFING YOUR INFORMATION MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Incorporating fire-resistant storage products into your records protection plan can help prevent total devastation in the event of a fire-related disaster. SafeTec file and media cabinets, safes and vault doors provide superior protection from fire and extreme heat. SafeTec products are built to exceed the stringent requirements of Underwriters' Laboratories and undergo extensive testing to ensure the safety and security required in today's highly regulated marketplace. From planning and implementation to follow-up, SYSTEC is your single source for information and material management solutions. ■

For more about how SYSTEC can help you, contact us at 1-877-7SYSTEC or e-mail us at info@sysitecgroup.com

Ensuring business continuity through preparedness

Many companies believe fire insurance is all they need to ensure business continuity after a disaster. In fact, the National Federation of Independent Businesses found 76 percent of small business owners believe insurance alone will adequately protect them. And while insurance can result in a financial reimbursement, it can't bring back sensitive, business critical records that are the foundation of a company's operations.

These vital records can be destroyed by fire within seconds. When fire strikes, business owners should be able to account for all employees and any important business records allowing them to pick up and return to operational status as quickly as possible. Each day without access to vital records is another day of profit lost, bringing a company one step closer to closing its doors.

The best insurance to protect any company from disaster is preparedness and employing the proper safeguards to ensure business continuity.

The role of the RIM professional

Often, records and information management (RIM) professionals become the creators and executors of these plans in addition to their everyday responsibilities. RIM professionals should consider educating themselves on the steps involved in developing a vital records inventory, creating a reliable and functional disaster and recovery plan and choosing the appropriate fire, heat, water and impact-resistant products and storage systems.

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Working with the right partner

Creating a vital records disaster and recovery plan can be an overwhelming task. Working with an expert experienced in disaster and recovery planning can help you assess your situation and develop a functional and realistic plan, as well as provide you with the appropriate products to protect your vital records.

By proactively preparing for a disaster you can protect the foundation of your company and ensure business continuity to ensure profitability and growth for many years to come. ■

Ask the
EXPERT



Ask the Expert is your opportunity to receive information management advice from industry experts. From new technology to process improvements, you will learn ways to capitalize on information assets. If you have a question, visit www.systecgroup.com and follow the Ask the Expert link. Your question will be answered in about a week.

Q: We had a fire at our office and our personnel files were subject to water damage. How do I repair those records?

A: The first step in records recovery is determining the number of records damaged and the extent of that damage. Fortunately, almost any wet paper-based document can be saved with immediate and proper action. If the number of damaged records is minimal and they are only damp or moderately wet, you can dry them in-house by laying them out, circulating dry air and possibly running a dehumidifier. The dryer and warmer the air, the faster the records will dry. Remember wet records should be handled carefully to prevent further damage. After records are dry, remove any dirt or dust with a soft cloth or brush. To handle a large volume of wet records, contact your local SYSTEC member to assist with the recovery. Consider transferring personnel documents to an electronic format that can be backed up and stored off-site as a preventative measure. ■



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