



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Business Continuity Planning in Severe Weather

Check List for Businesses

Prepared by the Department of
Business, Enterprise and Innovation
Gov.ie

Business Continuity Planning Checklist - Responding to a Severe Weather Event

The following is a checklist of the key risks to the continuity of your business activities in the event of a severe weather event and preparatory actions that can be taken to respond.

1. Planning Activities

Not Started	Underway	Complete	
			1.1 Assign responsibility for planning and preparedness to a senior executive and a deputy
			1.2 Obtain information on severe weather events and review the impacts of previous weather related events for the business
			1.3 Consult within the company and with staff / labour representatives
			1.4 Consult with suppliers on measures they are taking and on potential disruptions to supply chains
			1.5 Assess 'high level' impact on your business and attach appropriate priority to the planning process
			1.6 Develop a business continuity plan
			1.7 Establish authorities, triggers and procedures for implementing plan
			1.8 Test the plan in exercises
			1.9 Share best practice with other businesses
			1.10 Revisit plan periodically

2. Business Issues to Address

Not Started	Underway	Complete	
			2.1 Identify critical activities and the employees and inputs required to maintain them
			2.2 Consider the possible impact of employee absences
			2.3 Consider the possible impact of disruption to the supply of inputs
			2.4 Examine the likely impact of a severe weather event on your market and on your customers' requirements
			2.5 Identify and agree strategic imperatives
			2.6 Understand the business need for face-to-face meetings during a severe weather event
			2.7 Understand the special needs of some employees during a severe weather event
			2.8 Consider the issues for business related travel during weather related disruptions to road, rail, sea and air transport as appropriate
			2.9 Consider the financial management implications of a severe weather event
			2.10 Examine the extent to which others will be dependent on your business in the event of a severe weather event

			2.11 Consider the circumstances under which you might decide to scale back or suspend operations during weather-related disruptions
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3. Measures to Underpin Continuity

Not Started	Underway	Complete	
			3.1 Nominate deputies
			3.2 Cross-train, and identify alternative sources of labour
			3.3 Communicate with staff in a manner appropriate to the current state of weather alert
			3.4 Prepare an emergency communications plan
			3.5 Prepare policies on sick leave and compassionate leave during a severe weather event
			3.6 Prepare policies on foreign travel during a severe weather event
			3.7 Plan for the needs of staff overseas
			3.8 Make arrangements to assure supplies in the event of a severe weather event
			3.9 Consider the possibility of changes to your product, your service, or your interaction with customers, during a prolonged severe weather event and plan for any changes you consider appropriate
			3.10 Review insurance coverage

4. Responding to Workplace Risks from Weather Related Events

Not Started	Underway	Complete	
			4.1 Plan to provide for external snow/ice clearance
			4.2 Plan for frequent and effective cleaning of the workplace
			4.3 Prepare HR policies
			4.4 Prepare flexible work policies
			4.5 Plan measures to reduce face-to-face contact with customers/suppliers and between employees from different sites
			4.6 Identify work organisation measures
			4.7 ICT infrastructure Planning

Signed
(Executive Responsible)

Using the Checklist

This section provides guidance on preparing the checklist.

1 Planning Activities

1.1 Assign responsibility for planning and preparedness

Your organisation should appoint a severe weather planning coordinator and/or team with defined responsibilities and budget for planning and for preparedness. A deputy should also be appointed.

If your organisation already has a business continuity planning process, you should review and consider how weather related events are prepared for and the effectiveness of the process in the past.

1.2 Obtain information on weather emergencies

This document provides advice on the business aspects of preparing for severe weather related event. The information below may be useful in gathering information on the weather event.

General

- [Met Eireann](#)
Ireland's National Meteorological Service's website
- [Office of Emergency Planning](#)
This website provides updates from the Government's National Emergency Co-ordination Group. For further information Tel 01 237 3800 or LoCall 1890 252736.
- www.winterready.ie
This website brings together advice from a number of sources including Government Departments, An Garda Síochána, the Health Service Executive, Local Authorities and the transport providers. The advice has been categorised under various headings including: the Home, Road Safety, Schools, the Farming Community and the Business Sector. A synopsis of the information available has been compiled into a booklet which can be downloaded from the website.
- [Irish Water](#)
Irish Water has tips on its website to prevent frozen pipes and unexpected leaks which may affect the water supply to your business. Alternatively visit their Twitter customer care @IWCare or in an emergency call them on 1850 278 278.
- [ESB](#)
For information on any power outage updates, please go to: esbnetworks.ie/power-outages-updates/latest-updates

Employment Information

- [Workplace Relations Commission](#)
The Workplace Relations Commission provides advice on [Unforeseen circumstances affecting normal employment situations](#).
If you wish to seek additional information on your workplace situation you may

Speak with an Information Officer of the Workplace Relations Commission at 1890 80 80 90 or 059 917 8990, Monday to Friday 9:30am to 5pm. The service is available for both employers and employees.

- [Health and Safety Authority](#)
Please contact the Health and Safety Authority if you wish to report any work-related safety risks on: 1890 289 389 between 9:00am to 12:30pm, Monday to Friday.
- [Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection](#)
The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection provides information around social welfare benefits.

Other bodies, including air and sea ports, representative organisations and local authorities within Ireland may also provide relevant information and advice.

1.3 Consult within the business and with staff / labour representatives

Consult widely within the business. A severe weather event or emergency has the potential to impact on all aspects of the business.

Consult in an appropriate way with staff and labour representatives. In the event of a severe weather event, the capability of the business to operate may depend on employee confidence in its response.

1.4 Consult with suppliers

Consult with your key suppliers and subcontractors to clarify whether they have robust business continuity plans in place. You will need to understand how they are likely to react in the event of a severe weather event and consider how they have coped on previous occasions. It may be possible to make alternative arrangements to secure supplies or service.

1.5 Assess 'high level' impact on your business and attach appropriate priority to the planning process

Your organisation should initially prepare a 'high level' impact assessment on the business. This should provide a financial assessment of the impact and propose strategic priorities for the business in the event of a severe weather event, and an outline budget for the development and maintenance of the business continuity planning process. This should be approved by the board and/or senior management as appropriate.

1.6 Develop a plan

Use this checklist to help in developing a plan to prepare for a severe weather event, and to respond in the event that an emergency occurs.

A severe weather event is not the only threat to business continuity that your business faces.

Once the plan is developed, consider using it as the starting point for a business continuity plan that addresses a wider range of risks.

1.7 Establish authorities, triggers and procedures for implementing the plan

Establish who will have the authority to trigger the plan and its elements. Establish procedures for implementing the plan.

There should be clarity as to the circumstances under which the plan will be triggered and terminated. Many businesses internationally use warnings from meteorological and weather forecasting services or by governments to trigger the various elements of their plan. For most Irish businesses, the key severe weather frameworks and alerts will be from Met Eireann and the Government's Interdepartmental Group on Emergency Planning.

1.8 Test plan in exercises

Implement an exercise to test your plan. Develop a scenario based on a moderately severe weather event. It is likely to include elements such as:

- A period of days or weeks after the severe weather event first occurs
- A period when staff absences rise to a peak before falling off again
- Repetition of this pattern once or twice over the winter period
- Absence of some specific essential staff, including key managers and key IT staff, for periods
- Implementation of strategies to reduce the risks of travel to employees, customers, suppliers
- Disruption to customers and market
- Disruption to suppliers and logistics

If you wish to include disruption to an essential service in the scenario, consider that a fault develops, and it takes significantly longer than usual for it to be resolved. Consider the possible implications of disruption to the waste collection service. Work through the consequences of the scenario, either as a desk exercise, or with line managers and staff. Revise the plan based on what is learned from the exercise.

1.9 Share best practice with other businesses

Discuss planning and preparedness for a severe weather event or emergency with other businesses. Use business networks or other business organisations to share best practice, to learn from each other, and to engage in joint exercises.

1.10 Revisit Plan Periodically

You should revisit, and retest, the plan periodically, at least once per year, to ensure that it remains current. You should check that preparations that could go out of date (e.g. phone lists or arrangements for deputies) are up to date.

2 Business Issues to Address

2.1 Identify critical activities and the employees and inputs required to maintain them

Consider what activities will be essential to your business in the event of a severe weather emergency, and what activities will be of lower priority. Identify what people and inputs are required to keep essential activities going.

2.2 Consider the possible impact of employee absences

It is likely that there will be very significant employee absences in the event of a severe weather event. Just how extensive the absences are will depend on the severity of the weather emergency, and also on factors specific to the business, and on how employees respond to the weather emergency.

Employees may be absent for a range of reasons:

- Those who are ill with colds or flu or weather related injuries that cannot attend work.
- Some employees may have other illnesses that justify non-attendance. Other illnesses may continue to occur during a weather emergency.
- Some employees may wish to remain away from work to provide care to ill relatives. In the event of school and/or childcare closures, others may wish to remain at home to care for children.
- Some employees may have difficulty in arranging transport to work.

The likelihood is that non-attendance will peak during the most severe weather related events such as snow storms or severe freezing. These could be for prolonged periods over days in the case of snow fall and weeks in the case of persistent low temperatures. It is not possible to predict with confidence how high absenteeism will rise in your business. It will depend on factors such as how employees perceive the risks, whether local schools close, and related increases in illnesses such as colds and flu and the measures you take to within the workplace.

Factoring in absences due to other causes, it would be prudent for a typical business to take account of a scenario under which 40% of its employees are absent during peaks of severe weather when planning. You should also take account of the possibility that levels of absence could be significantly lower than this, or indeed could be higher.

Consider whether there are critical business activities that are vulnerable to the absence of a small number of key staff. There may be key managers. You may depend on a small number of IT staff to operate. You may depend on a specialist function such as a laboratory, or on a small number of certified professionals.

Owner-managed SMEs may face particular challenges that may need to be considered where the owner-manager becomes ill or otherwise immobilised while the business is under stress from a severe weather event or emergency.

2.3 Consider the possible impact of disruption to the supply of inputs

Identify your key suppliers. For each key supplier:

- Understand to what extent inventories buffer your business from supply disruption;
- Explore what the impact would be if the supplier was unable to serve your business, if it could not supply usual volumes, or if its lead times lengthened;
- Assess how vulnerable the source of supply is to disruption caused by a severe weather event, taking account of staffing issues, the supplier's upstream supply chain, competing commitments and any other factors that seem relevant;
- Assess how vulnerable your business is to problems with logistics;
- Assess whether your business would have access to alternative sources of supply, and whether this would improve security of supply meaningfully.

2.4 Examine the likely impact of a severe weather event on your market and on your customers' requirements

Consider whether demand for your product is likely to decrease in the event of a severe weather event.

- If your product or service is not a necessity and if it depends on your customers, then demand may fall.
- If you are supplying other businesses, they will also be affected by a weather emergency. During severe weather events, manpower shortages may mean that they cannot use as much of your product as usual. Your customers' markets will also be affected by the weather emergency.
- Any disruption to international logistics could have a ripple effect on demand.
- Consider whether demand for your product is likely to increase in the event of a weather emergency.
- Demand for some types of communications service may rise.
- Some products and services will be more attractive than others in a weather-related emergency. For example, home delivery services that facilitate people in avoiding leaving their homes may well increase.
- If your products and services that are good substitutes for other products or services that become less attractive during a weather emergency, then demand may increase.

Customers may wish to change the ways in which they engage with you during a weather emergency. Many customers will wish to reduce or eliminate face-to-face contact with your people. Selling, taking orders and providing customer service by telephone or over the Internet is likely to become more popular. If you sell to consumers, home delivery services and product picking services may be attractive.

2.5 Identify and agree strategic imperatives

A severe weather event is likely to have a significant impact on your business. As a context for the planning process you should identify, discuss and agree strategic imperatives.

These might include issues such as:

- Ensuring business survival.
- Protecting existing customers.
- Protecting employees.
- Acting in a socially responsible manner by taking account of the wider health, social and business implications of decisions, and providing support to the local community where possible.

2.6 Understand the business need for face-to-face meetings during a weather emergency

Review the type and number of face-to-face meetings that take place with customers and suppliers, and within the business. Consider what the business need is for these meetings. Consider whether the business need dictates that a face-to-face meeting is necessary, or whether other approaches might be feasible.

Consider whether participants who would usually demand a face-to-face meeting might prefer an alternative approach in a weather emergency.

2.7 Understand the special needs of some employees during a weather emergency

Your employees will not all be affected in the same way by a severe weather event.

- Some will have specific health needs.
- Some will place a high priority on maintaining their income.
- Some will have more caring responsibilities than others.

2.8 Consider the issues for business related travel during a weather emergency

In the event of a severe weather event, there may be a widespread disruption or unavailability of mass transport, including air travel, particularly during peak weather events, and planning of alternatives may be necessary.

2.9 Consider the financial management implications of a severe weather event

Consider what the financial impact of a severe weather event may be, on profits and margins, and particularly on cash flow. For example:

- Demand for your business's products or services may fall;
- Manpower levels may be reduced (with the impact on cash flow depending partly on the business's sick leave and compassionate leave arrangements); and
- It may not be possible to maintain production levels.

Identify the areas where a problem has the potential to threaten the business's financial stability.

Consider how to manage finances during a severe and prolonged weather event so as to maintain financial stability.

2.10 Examine the extent to which others will be dependent on your business in the event of a weather emergency

In addition to considering your business's own needs, you should understand whether others are dependent on your business.

- Does your business supply critical sectors of the economy where ongoing and timely supply of goods and services from you is essential, such as the Irish health service, or healthcare providers internationally?
- Do people depend on your business for food, heating oil or other essentials?
- Do other businesses depend on your business to operate?

2.11 Consider the circumstances under which you might decide to scale back or suspend operations during a weather emergency

The main purpose of business continuity planning for a severe weather event is to plan for continuity of operations through the emergency. Even so, circumstances may arise where it is in the long-term interests of the business and its employees to intentionally scale back or suspend operations.

This is most likely to be relevant:

- Where market demand for your product or service has fallen sharply;
- If the business runs out of inputs;
- If a high proportion of employees are unavailable or ill simultaneously; or
- If the emergency immobilises or causes dislocation of a large numbers of people (e.g. flooding).

3. Measures to Underpin Continuity

3.1 Nominate deputies

In the event of a severe weather event, people in key positions may be unavailable for work for periods.

As a part of the planning process, nominate deputies with the authority to manage, make decisions and undertake appropriate actions. As the first deputy in line for a role may also be unavailable, back-up deputies should also be nominated.

3.2 Cross-train, and identify alternative sources of labour

Consider introducing or extending cross-training to:

- Increase the number of employees who can do essential specialist work; and
- Increase flexibility in assigning employees to different roles.

Consider preparing an additional pool of workers, such as retirees or contractors.

3.3 Communicate with staff in a manner appropriate to the current state of weather alert

Disseminate information to the workforce that is appropriate to the current state of a severe weather alert.

The level of detail that it is appropriate to disseminate will increase from the Government's National Emergency Coordination Group.

Communications with staff should address:

- Status of the severe weather alert/emergency and possible impact on the business and operations; and
- The business's weather emergency preparedness and response plan, and employees' role in the plan.

Communications should be appropriate to the target audience in terms of content, presentation and language. Reminders of ice and snow safety and preparedness should be posted on physical/electronic notice boards, in the employee newsletters etc before and during the severe weather events.

3.4 Prepare emergency communications plan

Prepare an emergency communications plan, for communication with employees, customers, suppliers and other stakeholders in the business. The plan should identify key contacts (with back-ups), chains of communications, and processes for tracking business and employee status.

Consider preparing platforms, such as dedicated websites and hotlines, for communicating with employees, customers and suppliers about the organisation's status, about the actions it is taking, and about the actions they should take.

Consider preparing notices on subjects such as site safety and customer/supplier engagement in the event of a severe weather alert.

The plan should be designed to ensure that communications are culturally and linguistically appropriate. For some businesses, it may be important that communications be made available in more than one language.

3.5 Prepare policies on sick leave and compassionate leave during a weather emergency

Establish policies on sick leave absences unique to weather emergency. These should take account of:

- the likelihood that it will not be practicable for employees to visit medical practitioners to examine and certify staff who become ill;
- the need to judge when a person can return to work if they have developed conditions such as flu etc.

Establish policies on compassionate leave unique to a weather emergency, to cover circumstances such as:

- where employees are bereaved;
- where employees face a pressing need to provide care for others; or
- where employees are at high risk if they travel to/from work etc and cannot adequately limit their risk.

Consider what the business's response should be to absenteeism during a weather emergency, taking account of:

- The business's need to have employees attend so as to maintain business continuity and activity;
- The pressures some staff may be under to remain away from work; and
- The common interest that the business and employees have in business survival and in limiting employee turnover.

3.6 Prepare policies on foreign travel during a severe weather event

In the event of a weather emergency abroad, develop policies on travel to affected geographic areas overseas, and on employees working in or near affected areas, taking account of advice from the Department of Transport and Foreign Affairs and Trade. Prepare policies on international business travel, taking account of possible disruption to flight schedules and the likelihood that many staff will be reluctant to fly.

3.7 Plan for the needs of staff overseas

Consider how to manage and support staff overseas and their families that may be in Ireland during a weather event and consider issues such as repatriation and payment.

If the business has subsidiaries or other operations overseas, ensure that they also plan for the possibility of severe weather events in Ireland and the impact such events could have on overseas operations in terms of supply of goods, services and personnel.

3.8 Make arrangements to assure supplies in the event of a weather emergency

Consider taking action to assure continuity of supply in the event of a severe weather event.

- Explore the possibility of obtaining commitments as to the priority that suppliers will place on supplying your organisation in the event of an emergency.
- Encourage suppliers (particularly small suppliers) to plan for severe weather.
- Identify alternative sources of critical inputs, and make arrangements to draw on them in the event that supplies are disrupted.
- Review contracts to take account of circumstances that may arise in the event of a severe weather event.

3.9 Consider the possibility of changes to your product, your service, or your interaction with customers, during a prolonged severe weather event and plan for any changes you consider appropriate

Consider changes to the product or service your business provides during a weather emergency.

- Is it possible to provide the product or service with less face-to-face interaction with customers?
- If there is disruption to supplies will it still be possible to produce a product or service that will satisfy customers' minimum needs?
- Is it possible to reduce the labour input into the product or service, perhaps by reducing variety, by operating to a lower specification or by limiting customer service?

3.10 Review insurance coverage

Review all aspects of your insurance coverage, to ensure it is likely to be sufficient for circumstances likely to arise in severe weather or weather emergency. Among the areas of insurance you may wish to consider reviewing are:

- "Key man" insurance;
- Liabilities that may arise from severe weather such snow, ice, flooding etc;
- Whether levels of cover are adequate;
- Whether any exclusions may be relevant.

Discuss with your insurance broker whether your business is well covered.

4 Responding to Workplace Risks from Weather Related Events

4.1 Plan to provide for external snow / ice clearance.

In the event of snow or ice there will be a need to create safe entry and exit to the premises and facilities and plans will need to be made for snow and ice removal with appropriate preventative procedures.

A survey of premises should be conducted to identify specific challenges for snow removal vehicles. Fencing, posts, and concrete curbs are some of the items that may be difficult to see after snowfall begins. Pre-winter conditions of these items will be documented. Ensure there are adequate supplies of weather related supplies and equipment available in advance of anticipated weather related events and appropriate suppliers should be identified as part of the plan. These include, where relevant, adequate manual equipment such as snow shovels, ice scrapers and brooms.

Preventive maintenance on snow and ice removal equipment should be performed before the projected date of first snowfall. An assessment should be made of how much ice-melt such as salt and sand would be needed in the event of a severe and prolonged weather event. Plans should also be made to ensure a supply of walk-off mats, interior and exterior. Assess also whether in-service training for staff involved in snow removal will be required, covering safety procedures, equipment procedures and proper body mechanics.

For larger premises or where internal resources may not be available, take steps to have a snow and ice removal contractor available and ensure the contractor has a knowledge of the premises and grounds to review performance expectations in advance of severe weather.

4.2 Plan for frequent and effective cleaning of the workplace.

Weather related events such as flooding or freezing ice with burst pipes etc. can give rise to additional cleaning requirements in the workplace and plans for dealing with such possibilities should be prepared for. Many of these issues may be addressed in the site's Health and Safety Statement and it should be reviewed in this context.

4.3 Prepare HR policies

Prepare policies on attendance by employees who have difficulty travelling to work, require special arrangements for working from home or compassionate leave arrangements.

4.4 Prepare flexible working policies

Prepare policies on flexible work locations (e.g. teleworking) and flexible working times (e.g. shift working)

4.5 Plan measures to reduce face-to-face contact with customers/suppliers and between employees from different sites

Aside from utility failure and logistics difficulties, severe weather events can be primarily looked upon as a people issue. Staff and customers can have difficulty travelling and risks of accidents are increased significantly. Business travel should be reduced in line with the current weather conditions and where practicable alternative measures put in place to maintain effectiveness (conference calls, video conferencing, on-line interactions).

4.6 Identify work organisation measures

Identify work organisation measures that can be taken to reduce potential for employees who are in the workplace and may have mild colds etc. to infect each other.

4.7 ICT Infrastructure Planning

Review what measures are required to provide ICT infrastructure to support teleworking and remote customer interaction. This should be done in advance of severe weather events as your IT resources may already be stretched responding to issues during the severe weather event. The use of cloud computing can be an effective means of ensuring business continuity, but will need to be planned in advance, ICT infrastructure for remote customer interaction may be considered, where maintaining orders is critical to the business, though the investment should take into account potential difficulties in supplying customers.

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