

THE COMMUNITY BUILDER

Disaster Preparedness... Proactive not Reactive

No matter where you are, there is the possibility that a disaster may affect you and/or your community. Whether it be a flood, a tornado, a hurricane or human related disasters, it is better to have a plan to handle it before it happens than to react after it happens.

Many Boards of Directors spend considerable time, effort and money planning for the betterment of the community. Tough decisions are made on the different varieties of flowers at the front entrance, the color of tile or carpet in the clubhouse and what type of social activities they will offer. While these decisions are relative to the day to day operations and maintenance of the community and need to be made, as in any business planning for the possibility of the unexpected is as important.

Do you really KNOW what your association is responsible for as far as insuring, repairing, or replacing in the aftermath of a disaster? Do you really know what the owners are responsible for insuring and replacing? Wouldn't it be a good thing to know? Your expert, your insurance agent, can answer your questions and should be a part of your planning.

Every association has basically the same mission statement: To maintain and protect the value of the property by enforcing the documents and rules and regulations while maintaining a spirit of community.

It is the ethical responsibility of the governing body of the association - the board of directors - to fulfill the mandate to focus its concerns toward the property. It is incumbent upon the board to spend some time creating a disaster preparedness plan. Most likely the manager will compile the actual information, but the Board must give the manager the direction, cooperation and resources to do so. Once the plan has been adopted, it then must be communicated to the owners. Unless everyone knows what the plan is and how it should be executed, it will do no good to those who need it.

Following are some of the best practices and suggestions used by managers over the past several years. These managers were privileged to have boards that took



THE COMMUNITY BUILDER

the high road and commissioned their managers to make plans for the foreseeable disasters that could happen on their property.

Hurricanes and Tornadoes

- Establish and maintain good relations with emergency services.
- Pre-contract with vendors each year with details on how soon they will arrive after the "all clear".
- Pre-determine a staging area for debris to be placed.
- Pre-contract for dumpsters for debris removal.
- Purchase battery powered walkie-talkies for communicating to employees and vendors when clean up begins (cell phones and Nextel may not work).
- Pre-determine a remote office site; reestablish office routine as soon as possible.
- Use the association's telephone voice mail outgoing message to give information to residents who will undoubtedly be calling you (you do not need to be on the phone talking to them now).
- Use the Association's website to keep evacuated residents informed (designate a volunteer to do this) OR have a volunteer from each block or building make phone calls to alert owners.
- If you have a manned gate, make sure the attendants and the residents know at what point the attendants will be sent home (if given enough warning) and that the gates will be locked in the open position to provide emergency ingress and egress.
- Inform residents ahead of time what the Board and management staff will and will not be doing for them before, during and after the storm event.
- Encourage residents to make their own preparations and evacuation plans, and to have their own NOAA radios (www.weather.gov/nwr).
- Board members should have a list of each other's phone numbers, next of kin contacts, and vital information (type of vehicles, tag numbers, etc.) to enable contact and for security purposes.
- Be aware of and publish the locations of emergency shelters and local evacuation routes.

THE COMMUNITY BUILDER

- Pets should never be left behind - be aware of shelters for pets or pet friendly shelters.
- If a hurricane: Have plans to shut down and secure clubhouses and other amenities; furniture storage; electric shut-offs; water shut offs are a must.
- Make sure copies of important papers and files are kept safe and can be moved at a moment's notice.
- Publish a priority repair and reinstatement list, so residents will be aware of what will be restored first in the community.
- If possible, stock a closed utility trailer with emergency supplies, recovery equipment and tools such as first aid kits, chainsaws, ladders, rope, tarps, tape, hammers, flashlights and lanterns, extension cords, squeegees, mops, gloves, boots, rain slickers, etc. (remove it from site when you evacuate and bring it back when you return).

After a Storm, Hurricane or Tornado have enough:

- Cash to pay employees and vendors
- Fix-A-Flat supplies (keep a box full)
- Blue tarps
- Duct tape
- Sturdy shoes and gloves
- Ice & water
- Fuel & plastic gas containers

Floods

- Adjust water in ponds and lakes
- Prepare sand bags
- Clean storm drains
- Have submersible pumps on hand
- Dumpsters for debris
- Debris staging area

THE COMMUNITY BUILDER

- Afterward, contact water removal and mold remediation companies (for condos or common area amenities affected)

Other Crises and Disasters to Consider

- Wild animals and reptiles (coyotes, bobcats, bears, pigs, skunks, etc.)
- Mosquitoes and termites
- Rat, pigeon or duck droppings
- Bat or bee infestation of roof and eaves

While not as devastating as the incidents listed above, they can cause health problems to residents or damage to common areas and should be dealt with.

Sentry Management is also prepared for disaster. We have a direct connect generator that automatically switches on when the power goes out at our corporate offices so that our computer servers will be up and running and enabling us to continue to communicate and have access to your information. We also have remote back-up services on our systems that back up every day, with data kept at several locations to prevent a total loss.

FEMA.gov has an excellent website with information on cleaning up after the storm; contacting your insurance company and making insurance claims; and listing government assistance that is available. The Red Cross also has an excellent website for reference. Plan now, be prepared later.

Florida's hurricane season runs from June 1 through November 30, but other disasters don't have a season, it can happen at any time and it can happen to you. Be Prepared!

