Every business should have a plan. Get ready now.
out of town phone number where employees can leave an “I’m okay” message in a catastrophic disaster. If you have employees with disabilities or special needs, ask them what assistance, if any, they require.

Emergency Supplies: When preparing for emergency situations, it’s best to think first about the basics of survival: fresh water, food, clean air and warmth. Encourage everyone to have a portable emergency supply kit custom-tailored to meet their personal needs, such as the inclusion of essential medications. Make sure your employees aware about what emergency supplies the company can feasibly provide, if any, and which ones individuals should consider keeping on hand. Recommended emergency supplies include: water, food, both a battery-powered radio and a NOAA weather radio with an alert function, extra batteries, a flashlight, first aid kit, whistle, wrench or pliers to turn off utilities, filter mask, plastic sheathing, duct tape in the event of airborne chemical hazards and moist towelettes, garbage bags and plastic ties for personal sanitation. Keep copies of important records such as site maps, building plans, insurance policies, employee contact and identification information, bank account records, supplier and shipping contact lists, computer backups, emergency or law enforcement contact information, and other priority documents in a waterproof, fireproof portable container. Store a second set of records at an off-site location.

Planning to Stay or Go: Depending on your circumstances and the nature of the disaster, the first important decision after an incident occurs is whether to shelter-in-place or evacuate. You should understand and plan for both possibilities in advance by developing clear, well-thought-out plans.

In any emergency, local authorities may or may not immediately be able to provide information on what is happening and what you should do. However, you should monitor television or radio news reports for information or official instructions as they become available.

Make an Evacuation Plan: Some disasters will require employees to leave the workplace quickly. The ability to evacuate workers, customers and visitors effectively can save lives. If your business operates out of more than one location, establish evacuation procedures for each individual building. If your company is in a high-rise building, an industrial park, or even a small strip mall, it is important to coordinate any practice with other tenants or businesses to avoid confusion and potential gridlock.

Make a Shelter-in-Place Plan: There may be situations when it’s best to stay where you are to avoid any uncertainty outside. There are other circumstances, such as during a tornado or chemical incident, when specifically how and where you take shelter is a matter of survival. You should understand the differences and plan for all possibilities.

Go to www.ready.gov for more specific information on these topics as well as when and how to “heat-the-room” for protection from chemical contamination and steps to take for fire safety and medical emergencies.

Talk to Your People

Providing for your co-workers’ well-being is recognized as one of the best ways to assure your company’s recovery. That means communicating regularly with employees before, during and after an incident. Use newsletters, intranets, staff meetings and other internal communications tools to communicate emergency plans and procedures.

Practice the Plan with Co-workers: Frequently practice what you intend to do during a disaster. Conduct regularly scheduled education and training seminars to provide co-workers with information, identify needs and develop preparedness skills. Include disaster training in new employee orientation programs.

Promote Family and Individual Preparedness: If individuals and families are prepared, your company and your co-workers are better positioned in an emergency situation. Encourage your employees and their families to: get an emergency supply kit, make a family emergency plan and be informed about different threats and their appropriate responses. Go to www.ready.gov for more information or print out and distribute copies of “Preparing Makes Sense” brochures to your workers.

Write a Crisis Communication Plan: Detail how your organization plans to communicate with employees, local authorities, customers and others during and after a disaster. Include relevant information for employees, top company executives, the general public and your customers as well as local and state and federal authorities.

Support Employee Health After a Disaster: It is possible that your staff will need time to ensure the well-being of their family members, but getting back to work is important to the personal recovery of people who have experienced disasters. Work-place routines facilitate recovery by providing an opportunity to be active and to restore social contact. Re-establish routines, when possible. You may also want to consider offering professional counselors to help co-workers address their fears and anxieties.

In addition to emergency planning and communicating with employees, there are steps you can take to safeguard your company and secure your physical assets.

Review Insurance Coverage: Inadequate insurance coverage can lead to major financial loss if your business is damaged, destroyed or simply interrupted for a period of time. Insurance policies vary, so check with your agent or provider about things such as physical losses, flood coverage and business interruption. Understand what your policy covers and what it does not.

Prepare for Utility Disruptions: Businesses are often dependent on electricity, gas, telecommunications, sewer and other utilities. You should plan ahead for extended disruptions during and after a disaster. Speak with service providers about potential alternatives and identify back-up options such as portable generators to power the vital aspects of your business in an emergency.

Prepare for Natural Disasters: Businesses must be prepared to endure a catastrophic disaster. Common threats include fires, flooding, landslides, earthquakes and windstorms. Telco operators must be ready to provide service once the disaster has passed.

Secure Facilities, Buildings and Plants: While there is no way to predict what will happen or what your business’ circumstances will be, there are things you can do in advance to help protect your physical assets. Install fire extinguishers, smoke alarms and detectors in appropriate places. Secure ingress and egress and plan for mail safety. Plan what you will do if your building, plant or store is not usable. Secure valuable equipment. And make sure your building’s Heating, Ventilating and Air-conditioning (HVAC) system is working properly and is well-maintained. You should also determine if you can feasibly upgrade the building’s filtration system as a means of protection from biological and some other airborne threats.

Improve Cyber Security: Protecting your data and information technology systems may require specialized expertise, but even the smallest business can be better prepared. Use anti-virus software and keep it up-to-date. Don’t open email from unknown sources. Use hard-to-guess passwords. Protect your computer from Internet intruders by using firewalls. Back up your computer data and download security protection updates known as patches regularly. Subscribe to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security National Cyber Alert System, www.us-cert.gov, to receive free, timely alerts.

An investment in planning today will not only help protect your business investment and your livelihood, but will also support your employees, customers and stake-holders as the community, the local economy and even the country. Get ready now.