



FOOD PROTECTION CONNECTION

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS IN FOODSERVICE OPERATIONS

TAKING FIRST STEPS TO ENSURE CONTINUITY OF
ESSENTIAL SERVICES DURING DISASTERS

BY JESSY SADLER, SNS

IN THE EVENT OF NATURAL OR MAN-MADE DISASTERS, it is crucial for foodservice operations to respond in a well-organized and efficient manner, maintain safety for both employees and customers, and continue to provide essential services. Disasters can take different forms: hurricanes, blizzards, ice storms, tornadoes, flash flooding, and security threats all pose risks to human lives and property. Establishments such as healthcare facilities and schools play vital roles in our communities. Hence, they must be prepared to ensure an appropriate response within a very short time frame while continuing to provide care to those who rely on them.

As a Certified Dietary Manager, Certified Food Protection Professional (CDM, CFPP), you have the responsibility of working as part of an interdisciplinary team to not only ensure the safety and security of employees and customers, but also ensure the availability of food in a safe manner for potentially several days.

So how can you begin strategizing, getting ready, and educating staff for emergency situations?

Disasters can strike at any time, causing disruption to essential infrastructure, and foodservice operations are no exception. Natural disasters, cyber-attacks, power outages,

and even pandemics can disrupt operations, put staff and customers at risk, and cause damage to facilities. This is why emergency planning is critical for any foodservice operation.

THE FOUR PHASES OF DISASTER RESPONSE

Before we dive into the steps for creating an emergency plan, it's important to understand the four phases of disaster response. According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), disaster response consists of four phases: mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery.

- **Mitigation:** Involves taking actions to prevent or reduce the severity of a potential disaster. This would include identifying potential threats, developing emergency plans and procedures for disaster response, and staff training.
- **Preparedness:** Involves preparing for a disaster before it happens. This includes having emergency supplies on hand, such as food, water, and medical supplies; communication equipment, such as radios and satellite phones; and conducting emergency drills and exercises to test the effectiveness of plans and procedures.

ARE YOU READY?



- **Response:** Involves taking immediate and appropriate actions to address a disaster that has already happened.
- **Recovery:** Involves returning to and reestablishing normalcy after the disaster. Resources for this phase include support services for those affected by the disaster, such as counseling and financial assistance.

As a CDM, CFPP, there's always something that may require your attention on a day-to-day basis, from managing inventory to dealing with customer complaints. But what happens when disaster strikes? Are you and your team prepared to handle an emergency situation? In some cases, like labor shortages or equipment breakdowns, you can plan ahead and be prepared. However, when it comes to imminent health hazard events like flooding, sewage backup, or even water contamination,



EMERGENCY PLANNING is critical to ensure that your operation can continue to function even in the face of a crisis.

you and your employees need to be able to respond quickly and effectively to a spontaneous event. That's why emergency planning is critical to ensure that your operation can continue to function even in the face of a crisis, and simultaneously serve as a training guide for your staff to know exactly what to do to keep themselves and your customers safe. So, how do you create an emergency plan for your foodservice operation?

Here are some key steps to take:

Create a Response Team

Establish a group of employees who will be accountable for devising and executing the emergency plan strategically. This group should consist of individuals with varying skills from different areas of the operation, such as kitchen staff, custodial, IT, maintenance, transportation, and management. Together, they



REFERENCES

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should collaborate to identify potential risks and map out plans to mitigate them in case of an emergency. It is important to form a partnership with the community and local first responders. Contact information, such as cell phone numbers for team members, including phone numbers assigned to response teams, should be protected information and included in your emergency plan. Response team leaders should provide communication trees for their area of responsibility, which would also be included in the emergency plan. To create a competent team, it's best to match functional areas with similar duties and skills on the emergency team.

Identify Potential Hazards

Every operation has weaknesses and vulnerabilities. Examine your operation and recognize any potential hazards that may occur during an emergency situation, such as natural disasters based on location, power outages, or equipment malfunctions. After identifying the possible hazards, evaluate the probability and severity of each one. This will enable you to prioritize your planning and allocate resources efficiently.

Develop a Communication Plan

Establish a plan for communicating with your team during an emergency. Efficient communication is critical in such situations, and it is important to have procedures in place for connecting with your employees, customers, suppliers, and local authorities. This may involve phone trees, social media updates, or email notifications. It is advisable to incorporate various communication methods to ensure that your staff, customers, suppliers, and other stakeholders are informed and kept up-to-date on the situation.

Create a Plan That Fits Your Organization

Customize your emergency plan to suit the needs of your particular operation. Take into account factors like the size of your operation, the number of employees, and the types of emergencies that are most likely to occur. Incorporate specific policies and procedures into your emergency plan, such as plans for water supply, feeding, and staffing contingencies. In times of widespread disease outbreaks like

the COVID-19 pandemic, it was important to collaborate with your facility and follow guidelines from state and national agencies like the CDC. The pandemic made managing work schedules difficult for many parents who lacked childcare. Therefore, it's crucial to identify employees who, if necessary, may remain on-site during emergencies, as well as those who may face challenges with transportation or childcare.

Train, Review, and Update Your Plan Regularly

How efficient is an outdated plan during an emergency? It's important to understand that your emergency plan is not a one-time event but an ongoing process that requires regular testing, evaluation, and updating to maintain its relevance and effectiveness. Using an outdated plan during an emergency can cause confusion, which is why it's essential to keep your staff informed of any changes to the plan. It's important that every employee is knowledgeable about the emergency plan and equipped to handle any disaster situation. Your workforce is your most valuable resource

during a crisis, and their prompt and efficient response is critical. To achieve this, it's necessary to offer frequent training sessions and practice drills to ensure that your staff is well-versed on your emergency plan and can handle various scenarios. This could include training on evacuation processes, first-aid techniques, and communication protocols. Regular drills can be conducted to identify any shortcomings and implement necessary improvements. This will also help your staff become familiar with the plan and understand their responsibilities during an emergency.

TAILORING YOUR EMERGENCY PLAN: ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

In case of an emergency, the preparedness plan specifies how your operation will continue to function. This involves identifying alternative suppliers, backup power sources, and any other resources that may be required. While a generic template can be helpful to begin with, it is essential to create a list of procedures and steps and prioritize them based on the unique needs of your operation.

RESPONSE TEAM LEADERS
should provide communication trees for their area of responsibility, which would also be included in the emergency plan.



To develop an emergency menu cycle, it's important to anticipate the possibility of utility loss and kitchen shutdown, making it crucial to maintain an inventory of emergency supplies like manual can openers, scissors, or knives. Additionally, food items need to be regularly checked, rotated, and replaced as necessary, while accessible written recipes with minimal preparation and handling should be prepared to support the emergency menu. It's also important to note that the availability of emergency menu items may vary during a disaster, and written menus may need to be adjusted to prioritize perishable items and prevent spoilage.

Proper food storage is a crucial component of this puzzle, and the amount and variety of stored food will vary depending on several factors, including the facility, specific health requirements, and available storage space. To prepare for short-term emergencies, a simple approach may be to increase the quantities of staple and non-perishable foods that are typically used. FEMA recommends at least a three-day supply, while some foodservice establishments keep a four-day emergency inventory. Other operations rely on their existing inventory during an emergency. Regardless of the approach, the objective is always to provide safe and nutritious meals during an emergency.

ENSURING FOOD SAFETY AT ALL TIMES

When faced with an emergency situation that disrupts normal conditions, it becomes extremely important to prevent the spread of bacterial, viral, or chemical contaminants, and maintain proper containment protocols. Contamination of food can happen due to physical hazards like broken glass or from biological hazards such as viruses, bacteria, or parasites. Therefore, during a crisis, it is critical to prioritize the safety of food by taking measures to store it safely, maintain its temperature, and dispose of any contaminated items properly to prevent potential outbreaks of foodborne illnesses, which can pose a major risk.

WRAPPING IT UP

In summary, emergency preparedness is crucial for the foodservice industry to ensure the safety of staff and customers during a crisis. Emergency planning is an ongoing process that demands attention and adjustments to remain effective. Remember, the question is not *if* another natural or human-made emergency will arise, but rather, *when* it will arise. Don't let your lack of emergency preparedness be your next disaster. By prioritizing readiness, facilities can avoid the consequences of unpreparedness during future disasters. **E**



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CE QUESTIONS | FOOD PROTECTION CONNECTION



This **Level II** article assumes that the reader has a thorough knowledge of the topic. The desired outcome is to facilitate application of knowledge into practice by drawing connections among ideas and using information in new situations.



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1. Phases of disaster response include:
 - A. Mitigation, response, recovery
 - B. Planning, communication, recovery
 - C. Preparation, planning, response
2. Considerations for planning an emergency menu include:
 - A. Cook's preferences
 - B. The type of disaster or emergency occurring
 - C. Dietary and/or religious diet modifications
3. The emergency foodservice plan should:
 - A. Ensure the safe production, service, and storage of food during an emergency situation
 - B. Be designed to fit each facility's need and include specific processes
 - C. All of the above
4. Which is a reason to alter the emergency planned menu?
 - A. Certain utilities and equipment are unavailable
 - B. To utilize perishable ingredients first
 - C. The cook doesn't like making that specific menu item
5. One of the best ways to provide training to your staff and prepare them for disaster is:
 - A. Running mock drills
 - B. Taking inventory of emergency supplies
 - C. Sharing a list of cell phone numbers with everyone on staff
6. What is the first step to writing an emergency preparedness plan?
 - A. Forming a collaborative planning team
 - B. Writing goals and objectives
 - C. Identifying the threats and hazards
7. Which of the following can impact an operation's ability to serve during an emergency or disaster?
 - A. Lack of power or water supply
 - B. Lack of planning
 - C. Both A and B



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