

## **Business Continuity**

For businesses in the animal care industry to be functional in disasters and to be able to help animals and their owners effectively, they should have a comprehensive business resumption plan. Without such a plan the businesses will be nonfunctional for prolonged periods and will not be able to provide assistance. They also cannot be considered critical facilities.

## **Examples of Common Local Emergencies that are also Typical of Large Scale Events**

The events that can affect one veterinarian practice or animal shelter are indicative of the problems faced by many in large-scale disasters:

- Despite diligent daily backup of records the practice/shelter computer fails one day. A replacement cannot be installed for 3 days. A new system is needed but, when installed, has an error rate of 5% in the stored data.
- A municipal water supply main bursts, which takes 2 days to repair. During that time there is no water supply to the practice/shelter.
- A car hits a utility pole that carries power to the business. The phones and security system are no longer functional.
- A transient person is found dead close to a practice/shelter. The police department establishes a security ring around the site, which includes the entrance to the business. Clients are deterred for 2 days, and the local television news covers the story.
- A fire breaks out in a neighboring dry cleaning business. The practice/shelter has to be evacuated.
- A technician accidentally drops and breaks a bottle of halothane. All staff members are evacuated, and somebody phones 911. However, nobody takes the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS). The fire department does not know how to deal with the problem and evacuates the entire city block.
- The owner of the practice is injured by a dog and is hospitalized for 3 days.

Examples of the losses resulting from common disasters are loss of adequate animal care and health expertise and loss of income and family support to employees. Clients may have to seek advice from a neighboring practice while their regular veterinarian's practice is closed. Clients will be confused because they will have to reschedule elective appointments and seek alternative advice midway through therapy. (This could be especially difficult for a patient undergoing chemotherapy when the records of the original veterinary practice cannot be accessed.) Business disruption may also affect client loyalty and a practice's reputation. Accumulation or euthanasia of animals in shelters that otherwise might have been adopted can also result. Additional examples of the typical impacts of disasters are listed in the hazards sections of this book.

Large-scale disasters may also affect the sociodemographics of the area where a flourishing practice once stood. For example, after Hurricane Andrew the client base changed sufficiently for veterinarians to have to revisit their clientele base before resuming work or making a major financial commitment for future plans.

## **Business Resumption**

Several stages of business resumption should be anticipated as plans are made. First, employee safety must be ensured and exposure to hazard must be prevented. Only then can the resumption of business proceed. Employee safety was discussed in the previous chapter. This chapter will focus on the second major aspect of business planning: business continuity planning.

Several factors determine a business's capability to resume regular work. Some important ones to consider are the following:

- Vital records
- Employee availability
- Data retrieval and restoration of records system
- Insurance coverage
- Financial arrangements with banks and other creditors
- Customer retention
- Future business potential, including relocation
- Implementation of corporate by-laws and administrative regulations that ensure appropriate legal authorizations for company directors and officers to act in a time of disaster.

A number of expert sources of advice can be sought to help prepare business continuity plans. Some of these are listed in Appendix B. These include local fire, police, and emergency management agencies (EMAs), which can help with the identification of hazards and offer advice on how to mitigate them. Local security companies can provide a security survey. Also, a number of businesses specialize in business continuity planning, and several organizations can direct business owners toward local resources.