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Three Business Takeaways From The Wildfires



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Leadership Strategy

I write about risk and resilience both personal and professional.



A firefighter watches a wildfire in Riverside, Calif. (AP Photo/Ringo H.W. Chiu) ASSOCIATED PRESS

California's wildfires are slowly being brought under control, but bushfires are still burning in Australia. Whether your business is literally in the line of fire or not, there are key lessons that any business leader can apply when preparing for natural disasters. Here are three quick takeaways for any business trying to act responsibly and sustainably:

Prepare Your Business

Develop an understanding of your risk landscape, understand how those hazards could affect business, and implement risk reduction and response strategies. Carrying appropriate insurance coverage, while understanding its limitations, is an important component. However, insurance isn't the only tool you can use. Let's take the wildfire example. First, you should practice good fire safety. This could mean reducing fire risk by creating defensible zones around your facilities with concrete or rock and designing facilities with fire-resistant building materials. Even without the resources of a facility like [the Getty Center](#), there are fundamentals that would make a difference. Landscaping should incorporate fire-retardant plants like aloe over [flammable ones like those iconic California palm trees](#). The whole property should be well-maintained, because we can't all rely on a friendly herd of goats to clear the area like [the Reagan National Library](#).

And that's just wildfires. Is your business facing similar threats like tornadoes, coastal flooding or earthquakes? Are you prepared?

Show Employees You Care

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Business leaders must communicate that preparedness is a priority both at work and at home. It is essential that everyone knows about your incident response and business continuity plans. Make them comfortable with the fundamentals through company-wide awareness campaigns and involve them in exercises and drills. During an incident, be the lookout for effects. If an employee comes in late because of an evacuation or if they are experiencing health complications like [worsened asthma symptoms](#) due to wildfire smoke, it is important for employers to be considerate and make accommodations for impacted team members.

Beyond that, you also have to understand how a community-wide disaster can affect your team outside of work. Encourage all employees to create family preparedness plans and family go bags using resources from organizations like [CAL FIRE](#) or [Ready](#). Have they talked to their families about what would happen if they are caught on opposite sides of an active fire? For that matter, have you? Are you modeling responsible behavior for your team? Have you talked to your team recently about community-wide threats and whether you are all prepared to stay safe?

Invest in Sustainable Choices

We are all facing increased threats from extreme weather, and our infrastructure is generally not equipped to ward off the effects. In a strange turn of events, with the wildfire example, businesses in California now also need to be prepared for [the planned power outages](#) that Pacific Gas and Electric Co. is using as a preventive measure. Businesses must implement workarounds for these planned blackouts—whether that means work-from-home or backup power like generators. Any of these strategies will require an investment of time and resources. Without leadership and buy-in from the top, these kinds of measures are rarely viewed as a priority. It's on business leaders to communicate their value and allocate resources to invest in them.

Disaster preparedness is an opportunity to demonstrate corporate social responsibility while also safeguarding your business, team, and community. That's a win-win for everyone. I encourage business leaders everywhere to spend a little time with your plan in order to model a culture of preparedness. It will make us all safer and more resilient

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I am the president and CEO of Disaster Recovery Institute International (DRI), where I help organizations prepare for and recover from disasters both natural and manmad... **Read More**