

ACTIONS TO TAKE AFTER A DISASTER

Below is a check-off of issues to consider in the event a practice is severely damaged or destroyed. The list is not all-encompassing, but may provide an overall guide in the event a catastrophic disaster occurs. You may want to add, modify, change the order or take out some of these items depending on your practice and the extent of the disaster. Whatever checklist you formulate, you may want to keep it off-site where it would not be damaged and could be easily accessed.

Post-Disaster Checklist

ITEM TO BE DONE	BY WHOM	DATE DONE
Physicians and/or office manager contact employees regarding the extent of the disaster and what action employees should take in the short-term. The physicians within the practice and/or the office manager should notify all employees regarding whether the practice will open and to ensure employees can be notified about future actions.		
Secure all business and medical records.		
In the event of loss of records requiring compliance with HIPAA breach notification – notify patient, place notice in news and within 1 year notify government. Also notify your malpractice insurance carrier of this loss. http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/privacy/hipaa/administrative/breachnotificationrule/index.html		
Contact landlord and, if necessary, fire department for a general assessment of the damage. The physicians and/or office manager should contact the landlord or owner of the building to determine the extent of damage to office spaces occupied by the practice. If the practice owns the spaces, contact the local fire department for an assessment of the damage. If it appears that the damage is not significant enough to cause a major disruption to practice's business, employees should be notified of this. If, however, the damage is such that the practice may have to relocate for a significant amount of time (weeks or months), or permanently, the steps below should be considered.		
Reroute mail and phone calls. Mail to the practice should be rerouted immediately if the practice cannot operate. One avenue may be to obtain a post office box and have the mail rerouted to it. The mail should then be picked up daily. The practice should also consider where phone calls to the practice can be rerouted. Upon notification, a recorded message should be made available by your phone service provider or a voicemail message created until a temporary phone line can be established. Contact your phone service provider for options.		
Contact insurance carrier. When the insurance company is notified, the event that has occurred and initial damage assessment should be relayed. The company should also be asked how quickly it can have an assessor sent to the location for a full assessment of the damage to the building and facilities. It is important that such an assessment occur as quickly as possible. The practice should request that the property damage assessment be videotaped to ensure all damage is recorded. Provide any list or records available of equipment, medical supplies, and any other data that might be available to determine the value of the practice. Your accountant may provide copies of invoices, depreciation schedules, and other useful valuation documents.		

ITEM TO BE DONE	BY WHOM	DATE DONE
<p>Keep an account of all damage-related costs. The practice should track, and encourage all employees to track, all damage-related costs that may be incurred in the event of a disaster. Such costs might include mileage driven by employees, long-distance phone calls, equipment, mailing, leasing equipment, etc. Such costs should be reported, with receipts, to the practice's bookkeeper as they may be reimbursable by the insurance company or tax-deductible losses.</p>		
<p>Contact accountant and bank to reconstruct financial records. Contact billing service if one is used.</p>		
<p>Conduct salvage operations. Keep damaged goods on site until seen by an insurance adjuster. Once it is safe to enter the premises, the practice should assign personnel to conduct salvage operations as soon as possible. Any items or equipment that can be saved should be removed after being seen and documented by an insurance adjuster. If it is believed damaged property can be used again, it should be protected from further damage while remaining on the premises. Take pictures and or record everything to help determine loss at a later point.</p>		
<p>Call a meeting of key employees. Once the extent of the damage is known and the insurance company has been notified, the practice should call a meeting of all employees or, if a large practice, the principal supervisors. Such a meeting may be held at a location outside of the practice should the practice's spaces be unusable, or through electronic communication. While the following list is not all-inclusive, it is a suggested list of topics that may be discussed at the meeting or by electronic communication:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Damage assessment • Status of employees • Medical records access • Financial resources • Information processing • Office space needs – temporary/permanent • Immediate equipment needs • Contacting patients and suppliers 		
<p>Obtain new office space. After priorities are established, the practice should look into obtaining temporary/permanent office space. The landlord should be contacted regarding whether the office spaces will be able to be occupied in the near future. If not, a search for new office space should be conducted.</p>		
<p>Equipment needs for temporary office space. Consideration should be given regarding what equipment will be needed, both in the short-term and the long-term in the event the office equipment is damaged or destroyed. The practice should consult the list of equipment and assets kept for insurance purposes to have a good idea of what might be needed.</p>		
<p>Contact patients. Once the extent of the damage and priorities are determined, the practice's patients should be contacted. Depending on circumstances, patients should be told about the damage and where inquiries regarding treatment and records should be made. This may be done by an ad in the newspaper, through electronic methods, on the radio or some sort of mailing to existing patients if such a mailing list is kept off-site. You may also want to consider contacting other medical providers to find suitable alternatives for the care of your patients.</p>		

If a decision is made to close a practice, a separate checklist is available at:

http://www.aafp.org/dam/AAFP/documents/practice_management/admin_staffing/ClosingPracticeChecklist.pdf.