

## Making Plans

### Consultant discusses steps for devising a business-disaster plan

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SCHUYLER — Every organization should have a plan to deal with a hazard or disaster, one that focuses on both life safety and disruptions in the normal flow of operations.

And it doesn't matter if the organization is a business, a nonprofit, or a government agency.

That's according to Timothy Riecker, a partner in Emergency Preparedness Solutions, LLC (EPS), which is headquartered in Schuyler in Herkimer County.

Riecker has served in public safety for more than 17 years, 14 of which have been in the field of emergency management, according to the EPS website.

Riecker lumps hazards into categories that include weather events and earthquakes; "non-intentional human incidents,"

such as the failure of a dam or nuclear facility or a hazardous-material spill; and terrorist or events with a criminal intent, such as a shooting or a bombing.

He spoke with CNYBJ on Feb. 23.

"Most of the things in your plan are going to apply to most hazards, most of the time," says Riecker.

#### Create a plan

Devising a business-continuity plan requires a planning team, which Riecker says is "the first and probably most important aspect of the process."

The team should include representatives from the company's management along with its finance and human-resources departments.

"They may even also, for some of this planning, invite in area emergency-services [personnel] to advise [the

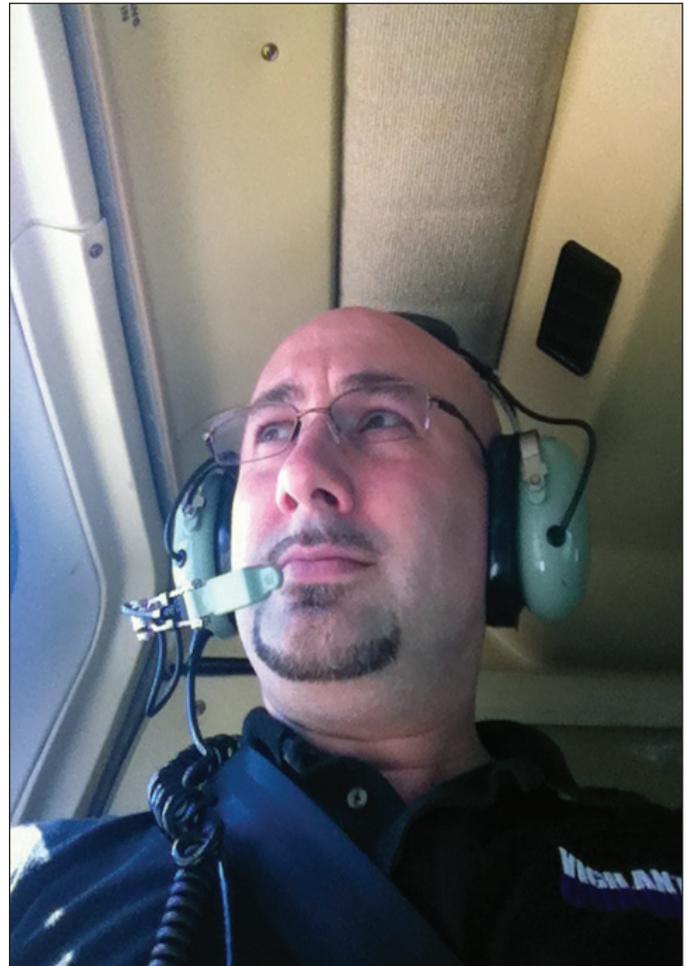


PHOTO CREDIT: TIMOTHY RIECKER

Timothy Riecker, a partner in Emergency Preparedness Solutions, LLC of Schuyler in Herkimer County, is inside a New Jersey State Police helicopter conducting an aerial survey of debris along the state's coastline following Hurricane Sandy. Riecker recommends companies assemble a business-continuity plan in case they would face a natural disaster.

firm from] their perspective," says Riecker.

The team should then identify potential hazards that affect areas of upstate New York — including the company's specific location — such as fires, floods, severe thunderstorms, and winter storms.

Afterward, the team should conduct a "hazard-vulnerability analysis," which identifies the frequency of such haz-

ards affecting the region or the company's specific area, and the potentially resulting impacts and severity of those impacts.

"Businesses also need to think comprehensively. They can't just necessarily think within their four walls," says Riecker.

Companies need to consider their suppliers, distributors, and other vendors connected to business operations.

As an example, Riecker says a firm should have a plan if a supplier travels north from Pennsylvania on Interstate 81 and a storm prompts a highway closure.

The team should next identify “mission-essential functions.”

“In doing that, the company really needs to look at those things that essentially must continue to be done for [it] to remain a viable business,” says Riecker.

They include legal and regulatory obligations, contractual obligations, and payroll.

After that, the team needs to conduct, what Riecker calls, a “business-impact analysis.”

“This is essentially taking into consideration the information [obtained] in the hazard-vulnerability analysis and looking at it through the lens of your mission-essential functions,” says Riecker.

The team then needs to examine ways to prevent or mitigate the hazards and how they could impact the business.

The “number one” step is ensuring the company has the proper insurance policies in place, says Riecker.

“Talk to your agent, have them come in, and ask them the question. Ask them about flood insurance and make sure you’ve given a fair evaluation of your business assets so you have a good replacement value,” he adds.

In addition, the team should make certain the firm has taken all steps to ensure

employee health and safety, along with having a sump pump, a sprinkler system, and smoke and carbon-monoxide detectors for flood and fire prevention.

“If those were in place ... just those things alone would prevent a lot of business losses,” says Riecker.

Once the team gathers all the necessary data, it can then devise the continuity plan that outlines strategies for handling the impacts of any hazards or disasters.

The plan, Riecker says, should be “implementation ready.”

“People can pull these [documents] out, take a look at them, and, in this moment of panic and information overload, they can see a very focused list ... of what it is that they need to do,” says Riecker.

The final steps involve training the staff on the plan, exercising the plan, and reviewing the plan.

For many businesses, exercising the plan will involve sitting down and going through a scenario of introducing a hazard and talking it through, says Riecker.

“And seeing if the plan holds up to its intent,” he adds.

If the plan has some flaws, Riecker says, the company should revise the document until it is comfortable that the procedures can help in an emergency.

Companies should review their continuity plans “annually, unless [they] have

some kind of a major change in the environment or in the business operation,” he adds.

Riecker also recommends two websites to help in the process, including [www.preparemybusiness.org](http://www.preparemybusiness.org), a website that the U.S. Small Business Administration sponsors; and [www.readyrating.org](http://www.readyrating.org), an American Red Cross website on which a business can create a profile and find out its level of preparedness after answering a series of questions.

The same business can log on periodically to update its score, he says.

## About EPS

Emergency Preparedness Solutions, LLC is a private consulting firm specializing in emergency and disaster planning, training, and exercises for private sector, government, and nonprofit clients, according to its website.

EPS provides services through individualized experiences, focusing on the needs of each individual client to prepare them for the direct and “cascading impacts” of naturally occurring and human-caused disasters, the website says.

The firm’s goal is to help its clients be better prepared for disasters, “resulting in preservation of life and property and minimizing financial impact.”

EPS serves clients locally and nationally, both as a primary consultant and as a subcontractor. ■