Green Industry: Planning to Continue Business Following a Disaster

A Guide for Facilitators

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**About This Course**

**Summary:** This is an instructor’s guide for a 1- to 1¾-hour course designed to introduce green industry producers to business continuity planning and to allow them to share ideas and develop the beginning of their own business disaster plans.

**Instructors:** Land-Grant University specialists, Cooperative Extension Service educators, and volunteers located in counties around the United States.

**Cooperators:** Anyone interested in helping green industry producers survive disasters.

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Before teaching this course, be sure you are familiar with the industry and can provide specific examples to your area. Also consider talking with a local emergency manager about risks that are specific to your geographic area.

The green industry is a mix of production, service, and trade-type businesses. This course focuses on the production sector, which includes growers of nursery crops (woody perennial plants that are usually grown in containers or in-ground), floriculture crops (bedding plants, potted flowering plants, foliage plants, cut cultivated greens, and cut flowers), and turfgrass sod farms. Because the green industry represents a significant portion of the nation’s economy, disasters that affect the green industry affect, directly or indirectly, the rest of the economy. Even production operations not physically affected by a disaster may be disrupted due to infrastructure shutdowns, shipping problems associated with inputs and products, reduced consumer demand, family and environmental concerns, cash flow disruptions, and perhaps enforced restrictions.

Producers have invested significant amounts of time, energy, and finances into their operations. Staying in business until one is ready to close down or transfer the operation is the goal. However, closing down for good may happen sooner than a producer is ready if planning for recovery doesn’t occur before the disaster. All sections of the country may face one or multiple types of natural disasters, and all are at risk of experiencing a man-made disaster.

This is a facilitator’s guide for a 1- to 1¾-hour session designed to introduce green industry producers to business continuity planning and to allow them to share ideas and develop the beginning of their own business disaster plans. Suggested times are listed with each activity. Use them to help you stay on time. Length of time for activities may be modified or an activity dropped depending on how much time you have for the session.
What’s in this packet?

- “Green Industry: Planning to Continue Business Following a Disaster,” EX-68-B.
- Assessment
- You Decide What to Do – handout
- Risk Assessment Checklist: Is Your Operation at Risk? – handout
- Preparedness Solutions – handout
- Plan to Continue Business Following a Disaster – handout
- Green Industry: Planning to Continue Business Following a Disaster Session Evaluation – handout
- Online Resources – handout
- "Agency Emergency Contacts for Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina," EX-68-C.

Goals:
1. Introduce participants to business continuity planning and provide reasons for planning.
2. Provide participants with a template for writing a continuity plan for their operations.
3. Review ways participants can protect their operations.

Objectives:
1. Given a risk assessment checklist, by end of the session participants will identify potential hazards and risks specific to their operations.
2. Participants will identify the three most critical operating functions to their operations by the end of the session.
3. By the end of the session, participants will have begun to identify ways to reduce the financial impact of a disaster on their operations using the provided list of preparedness solutions.
4. By the end of the session, participants will have begun writing their plans using the provided sample disaster plan.
5. Using a sample plan to continue operations following a disaster, participants will describe how they will share their plan with employees.
6. Within 3 months of completing the session, participants will develop a list of emergency contacts that will include suppliers, service providers, and emergency personnel and services. (Optional)
7. Within 3 months of completing the session, participants will meet with their insurance agents and identify insurance needs. (Optional)
Welcome and Introductions

(15 minutes) Introduce yourself and your organization and distribute the Assessment from EX-68-B, page 5. Ask the participants to complete the form and add their initials to the bottom of the page. Give the participants about 5 minutes to complete. Collect the completed forms [note: if you do not plan to review before and after attitudes, you do not need to collect the forms]. After they’ve completed the assessment, ask them to introduce themselves by giving their names and, what, if any, experience they’ve had with disasters (most will have an example—you may want to make note of the examples for use in later discussion).

Why plan?

[You say] The production side of the green industry—nurseries, greenhouses, floriculture operations, and turfgrass sod operations—contributes billions of dollars to the U.S. economy every year. In 2005, growers in the South represented approximately one quarter of the industry.

A 2002 EDEN survey of agriculture and horticulture producers revealed that 75 percent of the respondents thought it likely that agroterrorism could happen somewhere in the United States. However, more than half the respondents felt they were not properly prepared for agroterrorism or some other event on their operations. Forty-one percent indicated that loss of income due to impact on markets was one of the aspects at greatest risk.

Consider other potential disasters. During the first 6 years of the twenty-first century, 309 events throughout the country were declared major disasters by Presidential decree. Of those, 56 occurred in the gulf states of Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas.
Many growers were affected by these disasters and some were unable to continue operations. Planning for the unexpected event, whether natural or man-made, can significantly enhance your ability to recover from the disruption.

[Participant Activity: You Decide What to Do, EX-68-B, page 7.]

(10 minutes) Ask participants to take about 5 minutes to read “You Decide What to Do” and complete the decision matrix. When they have completed it, facilitate a brief discussion about the exercise. Here are a few suggested points of discussion:

1. Was there anything that could be done at this point?
2. Why is it important to have a list of hazardous materials available for emergency responders?
3. How important is it to have your business records backed up?
4. Have you ever had instances in which you experienced repercussions because you had not taken one or more of these steps before an event? What happened?
Assess Risk and Resources

[You say] In order to better plan for continuing operations after a disaster, you need to know your biggest risks. The risk assessment checklist is a tool for quickly identifying potential hazards to your operation. While the list does not include every potential risk, it can serve as a guide to determine the areas in which you are most at risk. Consider meeting with your local emergency manager later to help assess potential risks in your community.


(5 minutes) Distribute copies of the Risk Assessment Checklist and direct participants to determine which events their operations are most at risk of experiencing. If you have time, follow up with a discussion about experiences they described at the beginning of the session.

[You say] You have now identified hazards to which your operation is most at risk. What does it cost to lose operation time?

[Group Discussion]

(10 minutes) On a flip chart or board, list items as participants name them. (The list may include lost income, need to pay rent or mortgage, loan repayments, inventory, repairs, and ongoing bills.) You can follow up by asking about indirect costs. (What are some indirect costs you may incur if a disaster strikes one of your suppliers or retailers? This list may include lost reliance, contracts, and future business.)

[You say] With this list in hand, it's time to begin putting your plan on paper. Some parts of the plan will be easy to complete today. You may have partial answers to other sections and will need to follow up when you get home. Other sections must be completed after you have time for more deliberate planning and consultation with employees and people in the community.
Keep your plan straightforward and simple so it can be followed in an emergency. No plan is ever finished. By reviewing it and exercising it at least once a year, you will find and fix gaps.

[Participant Activity: Individual work time on sample plans, EX-68-B, beginning on page 19.]

(10 minutes) Distribute the sample plan and direct participants to complete the Operation Location (first page) and Emergency Contact Information page (page 21).

Identify Critical Operations

[Group discussion]

(10 minutes) Ask the participants to consider the what-ifs of their operations. Questions you can use to start the discussion:

1. What if your business office is not accessible?
2. What if the roads to your fields are flooded or your pesticide storage building burns?
3. What if lightning strikes one of your buildings?
4. What if you’re not directly affected by a disaster, but a major supplier can’t get through to your operation?

[Participant activity: Individual work time to identify critical operations]

(10 minutes) Ask the participants to list their primary operations on page 31 and then hone the list to the absolutely critical functions. Ask them to identify who is responsible and begin to write an action plan for each critical function. Points to help them determine direction are listed below.

Identify procedures critical to survival and recovery:

* decide what absolutely must be done
* plan for an emergency payroll
* create accounting systems to track and document costs
* establish procedures for succession of management
* review insurance for coverage of disasters for which your operation is most at risk
Who Needs to Know?

[You say] If you have employees, get input from them and share your plans with them. They may have specific suggestions that will improve the plan, and they need to know what to do in the event of an emergency. Review your evacuation and sheltering-in-place plans and maps of your operation with the fire and rescue units in your area. Determine what you will provide in a disaster kit and where the kit will be located. Have at least one person certified in first aid and CPR available at any time.

[Group Discussion]

(10 minutes) Ask participants to share ideas about how to communicate the plan to employees and family. Ask them how they plan to communicate with first responders and what might be important to share with the first responders. By planning ahead, they can provide first responders with maps and descriptions regarding their property and the contents (and content locations) of the property. They can record their communication plans on page 35.

[Participant activity: Individual work time to develop evacuation plans]

(5 minutes) Ask participants to begin outlining their evacuation and shelter-in-place plans using the following points as guidance. Refer them to pages 36, 37, and 38.

* Include a site map, a description of each building and its contents (chemicals, pesticides, supplies, machinery, etc.).

* List who will be responsible for preparing areas (i.e., shut down equipment, move machinery, etc.) and notifying employees.

* Determine an assembly site and who will be responsible for accounting for each person.

* Determine what absolutely must go when you go—records, personal items, etc.—and know exactly where they are so you can grab them and go.
Protect Your Assets

[You say] Documenting your assets will pay off in the event of a disaster. List your equipment and machinery, computers, buildings, and other items. In addition to listing the items [and serial numbers if applicable], take pictures of buildings and contents. Consult your insurance agent about specific documentation requirements.

[Participant activity: Individuals complete Financial, Insurance, and Succession section and complete the Preparedness Solutions handout.]

(5 minutes) Ask participants to go to page 39 to begin completing the Financial, Insurance, and Succession section of the sample plan. After they have had a few minutes to complete the information, ask participants to go to page 11.

[You say] In addition to your records, consider steps you can take throughout the operation to reduce or prevent damages. Review the Preparedness Solutions form on pages 11 through 13 and determine which of these steps you have already taken, and then decide which, if any of the others, are appropriate for your operation.

[Group Discussion]

(10 minutes) Ask participants to give examples of steps they have already taken to prepare for continuing operations after a disaster. Are there other steps they now intend to take when they return? What are they?
Conclusion

[Ask participants to complete the evaluation form on pages 15 and 16 and return. Note: the last section of the evaluation form is optional and may be removed before you make copies of the form if you don’t wish to follow up with the participants.]

[You say] While you may not be able to avoid a disaster, you can reduce the impact on your operation. Please take the time when you return to your work to complete your plan to continue business following a disaster!