

Emergency Response

What steps are necessary to work through an emergency response when damage has occurred to a facility? What needs to be done to continue working on a temporary basis and have as little downtime as possible?

■ By Jeff Eriks

There are a multitude of reasons why a waste collection and disposal company may need a new facility. Fire. Flood. Growth. Eminent Domain. Bad Neighbors. Consolidation. Some situations allow for plenty of time to plan while others require a quick reaction to the situation. While the preferred method is to take the necessary time to plan, sometimes companies encounter times when they have to react. One of the most common reasons for emergency response in the waste industry is fire. I have seen reports that the waste industry alone has around 40 fires per month throughout North America.¹ In these situations, the best solution to the problem needs to be created in as little time as possible, for the most reasonable price, which will allow operations to continue with little or no downtime. No matter the type of facility, the proper steps need to be taken to evaluate its current state. The first step in the process is to contact the insurance company to make sure that they know an event occurred and can schedule an adjuster to come out to the facility. Depending on what caused the event, the second step may be to bring in the proper authorities to file a report. Also, the cause of the event will need to be determined. If it was an operational issue, internal processes may need to be evaluated and adjusted to help prevent emergency situations in the future. Now let us focus on the building and planning pieces of an emergency response. This article will only focus on these parts and won't touch on the insurance, people or other issues that will also need to be handled.

Safety First

No matter the type of event, the first thing that should take place is determining if the facility is safe to re-enter. In order to do this, a structural engineer or a reputable design/build contractor should be contacted to assist in this process. Along with this, other professionals may be required in order to verify that there are no other hazardous conditions. The professionals will take the steps necessary to enter the building, evaluate the structural integrity as well as assess for other possible hazards that would prevent people from entering the building.

If the building is deemed safe to enter, then the obvious next step is to remove anything valuable from the facility that is salvageable. Once the facility is emptied of necessary items, it is time to complete the analysis of the structure and for the design/build contractor and other professionals to present the options.

The Options

In terms of the building, the options typically are: the facility is rebuilt or renovated, another facility is looked at to buy and renovate to meet your needs, or a new facility is built on another piece of property. All of these depend on the type of facility as offices, maintenance shops, transfer stations and recycling facilities all have to deal with different zoning requirements, building requirements and environmental issues. It also depends on if the property was owned or leased and how long the insurance company will take to process your claim. No matter which of these options are chosen, it will still need to be determined how to move forward on a temporary basis and how to plan accordingly.

Oftentimes, the local building departments or reviewing authorities will work with you given the emergency situation. This will vary based on their workload, the operation type, your relationship with them on a local level and the nature of the incident at the facility. It is important to treat them like a project partner and bring them proposed solutions before you just let them know of the issue prior to developing your options.

What are the Options to Minimize Downtime During Emergency Situations?

When you are evaluating your options after an event, you will need to identify the crucial operations that need to be up and running immediately and then identify the functions that are not as critical. This will help to identify the quantity of people or materials needed to deal with immediately versus over the next several weeks as temporary options are developed.



Safety first.

Emergency response.
Images courtesy of Cambridge Companies.



In emergency situations, there are several options to consider when it comes to temporary space:

- Rent another facility while the damaged facility is dealt with and repaired.
- Relocate people, materials or equipment to another location that is still operating at full capacity until the damaged facility is repaired.
- Temporarily rent facilities and place them on the existing property (if the space allows for it). This could entail office trailers, a temporary building such as a fabric covered structure or many other options that allow for the creation of roof space temporarily while you fight through the options.
- If the entire facility was not damaged, there are times when you can still occupy all or part of the existing building while the remaining gets repaired. This all depends on the damage done and the building being safe.

Once operations are back up and running on a temporary basis, it is time to focus on the replacement or renovation of the permanent facility. A lot of the decisions made in this process will start with the operations you were conducting at the building and the options available based on your zoning requirements. It will also vary based on insurance coverage and their timeline for handling the claim. If the building is a complete loss, you are likely looking at a 10 to 18 month timeline for the complete process (including handling the insurance claim, design, permitting and construction). The timeline will vary based on the size and complexity of the facility. If you only have to renovate part of the building, you can complete this process in a much shorter time frame. It is important to understand the complete scope of the entire process before you finalize your temporary solutions because you will not want to relocate temporary facilities; you want a solution that can carry you to the finish line.

A Special Note on Fire Prevention

Fire prevention is a key in helping to avoid or minimize emergency responses. First, it is important that fire extinguishers are checked and certified every year. They should also be properly placed within the facility. Second, the fire sprinkler system is a key to preventing the spread

of fires within any structure, whether it is occupied or not. All facility owners with sprinkler systems need to have a reputable fire sprinkler company come in every year and test the system to ensure it is working properly. Third, every building should have fire or heat detection along with smoke detectors that are tied directly to the fire department. If these are not in an existing facility, you are leaving yourself open to maximum damage because the response time for the emergency response teams will be much slower if it relies on someone spotting the fire as opposed to the devices within the building catching it early on.

Conclusion

Events like this occur at facilities across the country on a fairly regular basis, especially in the waste industry. Our industry is a dangerous one and you need to understand how to try and prevent fires and what to do if an event does occur. If something does occur at your facility, make sure it is safe to re-enter, understand your operations and prioritize the functions that need to be up immediately, evaluate your temporary options and make the arrangements, and then work on finalizing your permanent plans. Here is to hoping you never have to encounter a situation like this! | **WA**

Jeff Eriks is the Chief Business Development Officer for Cambridge Companies (Griffith, IN), a design-build firm hired to work with the Republic Services on the recently completed Southern Nevada Recycling Center and the City of Cape Girardeau (MO) on a new Transfer Station. Cambridge has worked in the waste industry for more than 20 years. During this time, more than 100 solid waste design-build projects have been completed including new build, repairs, upgrades and/or modifications at transfer stations, recycling centers/MRFs, hauling companies, landfill facilities, office buildings and more. Cambridge continually monitors the industry to determine any new needs, changes or improvements that will benefit their clients and improve their design-build solutions. Jeff can be reached at (219) 313-0813, via e-mail at JeffEriks@CambridgeCoInc.com or visit www.CambridgeCoInc.com.

Source

1. Fogleman, Ryan. Reported Waste & Recycling Facility Fires – U.S. & CAN 2016. LinkedIn Pulse. www.linkedin.com/pulse/how-many-recycling-fires-have-occurred-us-canada-within-ryan-fogleman. January 5, 2017.