



PREPARING FOR THE WORST: HOW CAN WE HELP?

September is [Emergency Preparedness Month](#). It is also the height of hurricane season; and this year is predicted by NOAA to be the most active season since 2012, when Hurricane Sandy pummeled the New Jersey coast and knocked out power to much of lower Manhattan. Even if you are located inland in an area that never sees hurricanes, extreme weather events from winter storms to flooding seem to be occurring with more frequency and the results are much the same: business interruption, safety and security concerns.

Are you prepared? According to an article published in the BOMA Magazine after Hurricane Sandy, just by having a managed service provider you are off to a good start. "Consider arranging for information to be housed in 'the cloud' by a company that specializes in hosting email and data to ensure accessibility from anywhere that has power and Internet access," the author wrote.

But using that resource to the full effect is not automatic. Kastle Systems and our customers also learned some valuable lessons from Sandy – ones that can apply to any weather or natural disaster emergency. Here are a some of the key ways that we can help each other to ensure we continue to provide you the highest level of service, even in the midst of a crisis.

Prioritize Generator Backup

Many businesses and buildings have generator backup, but sometimes they don't think of all the resources that could and should be tied to those generators.

"Customers always think about how precious their generator allocation is, and when the power goes out they are often reluctant to give Kastle a receptacle feed," says Tom Radigan, Kastle's Chief Customer Officer. While critical infrastructure is of course a top priority and you always want to make sure your mechanical and IT systems stay up and running, security is just as important.

Think about what typically happens in a natural disaster event: There may be flooding, high winds, damage to building structures and danger to tenants. If the power goes out, Kastle Systems are backed up for four hours; but after that time, without generator backup, communication is lost and all monitoring effectively ceases. Most doors will automatically unlock unless you have arranged to manually lock them, and all other communications with your security systems, including video cameras and intercoms will go down.

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“These are things that keep the pulse on the heartbeat of the building,” Radigan says. “Customers from Hurricane Sandy and others regretted not giving us generator access because when the power went out, our ability to be extra helpful went with it.” This doesn’t have to be the case. A mere 100 Watts of power – the equivalent of a single lightbulb – will allow Kastle to power a panel and up to five readers. As long as you can refill the gas tank, security and communications can be maintained.

“I paid \$1.79 for a gallon of gas today,” Radigan says. “We may burn half a gallon of gas an hour, but based on the 1200 pounds of holding pressure it takes to hold those doors locked, it is worth every single drop.”

Update Those Emergency Contacts

It is easy to get complacent when nothing has happened for a while. While a hurricane typically provides several days of warning, other natural disasters don’t. A recent heavy rain in a Baltimore suburb, for example, produced a flash flood that occurred in minutes and destroyed or severely damaged several buildings. Facilities should not only routinely update their internal contact information but also make sure providers and responders have the correct information.

“Another lesson we learned was that when things are going well customers sometimes get lapse with emergency contact procedures,” Radigan recalls. “A person may no longer be with the company, and we end up with bad information at the time when we most need it to be right.”

This includes making sure all your vendors have up-to-date contacts and that you have the correct numbers for your vendors as well. “We always want to know where our generator vendor numbers are,” Radigan says. Just knowing who to call when it happens can make a big difference, he adds. “You don’t have to know how to do everything in the moment, but you do have to know what tools are available at your disposal, and how to reach them.”

Have a Thorough Communication Plan

An effective communication plan encompasses much more than a call tree. For example, what procedures do you want your provider to take if someone is seeking shelter from a dangerous situation or a first responder needs access to the building for some reason?

“We as an operations center can communicate with both management and visitors, but they need to make sure that in their disaster planning we are part of that communication plan to make us more effective,” Radigan says. “We can help guide people through these storms. The more we know, the more we can help customers, whether it is tenants, the civil authorities, or visitors.”

For no additional charge, Kastle can even provide mass notification services through the myKastle platform. “They just need to let us know they want to use it in advance,” Radigan says. “It is more robust than a standard email list because we are keeping an audit trail of when communications were made. It’s a nice, easy service that can be done remotely and doesn’t cost anything extra.”

Having a managed service provider can be an invaluable resource in an emergency. Make sure you are using this resource to its fullest capacity. “For any customer considering a disaster plan, whether it is an ice, storm, earthquake or flood, it is critical to understand the importance of having Kastle on the generator, having good communications with our central station, and remembering that we are an extension of our customers,” Radigan advises.

For more on how Kastle can help with your emergency preparedness plan, visit www.kastle.com.